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# THE THIRD MISS WENDERBY

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**THE  
THIRD MISS WENDERBY**







THE THIRD MISS  
WENDERBY

# THE THIRD MISS WENDERBY

BY

MABEL BARNES-GRUNDY

AUTHOR OF

"TIA," "DIMBIE AND I," "HAZEL OF HEATH: -TIA-,"  
"HILARY ON HER OWN"

WITH FRONTISPIECE IN COLOR  
BY THE REESES

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## CHAPTER I

The first time in her life in which Diana Wenderby proved a real source of interest to her family — that is to say, her sisters and brother, for parents are perennially interested in their offspring — was when she suffered from a religious mania.

It happened when she was about seven years of age and took a peculiar form. She became destructive. She broke things. She tore valuable books to pieces. She jumped on her mother's watch, smashing the mainspring and works beyond repair. She stole peaches from the south wall when the gardener had gone home to his dinner. She hid her sister's jewellery.

To the uninitiated in the delicate working of the mind of an imaginative and highly strung child there would appear to be little connection between such acts of violence and religion. But there was.

On Diana Wenderby's seventh birthday she was the recipient of a book from an old friend of her mother. It was called "Christie's Old Organ," and was entirely responsible for her campaign

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of wickedness, or, as her mother preferred to describe it, her religious mania.

The moral, the suggestion, the promise of that book was that though your sins may be scarlet, with prayer and a surrendering of yourself to the Lord, combined with general good management, they would become as white as snow.

Whether Diana expected a miracle to take place before her very eyes; whether her sins, which, in her mind, resolved themselves into the shape of pieces of frayed scarlet flannel, would of a sudden, she imagined, be transformed into something of dazzling whiteness, she was never afterward able to say. But she did know, after sobbing over "Christie's Old Organ," with her hot cheeks pressed against a cold mahogany table in the drawing-room, that she meant to put its promises to the test. She would surrender herself to the Lord—that is, if she knew how. She would wrestle in prayer. She would say, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief," though the last seemed rather foolish and unintelligible to her, because *if* you believe, well, you can't disbelieve.

The only trouble and drawback to Diana in her preparations was that it seemed to her her sins were not big enough, not sufficiently important,

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to insure the correct working of the miracle — for a miracle it *would* be if a black, or in her case, a red, flannel sin became as white as snow. Such a teeny naughtiness as slapping Drusilla for washing the pink from her, Diana's, best doll's cheeks, or of turning the garden hose on to her brother George when he snatched an apple from her, and, climbing a tree, munched it before her angry eyes, were too insignificant, too petty to worry round about and expect the Lord to be interested in, and in whose favour work miracles. So she started on her campaign of wickedness.

She began with "Pilgrim's Progress," a handsome book with gold lettering and gilt edges, which adorned a side table in the drawing-room. She tore its pages to shreds, poked holes in Christian's eyes and nose, and then went up to the bedroom she shared with Drusilla and prayed hard for forgiveness. Nothing happening, and being hungry, she went down to the schoolroom and made a good tea of shrimps and bread and butter.

Later on she tore up more books: several poets and the "Ingoldsby Legends," a book much beloved by her father. Then she attacked an atlas, and when her nurse came to take her off to bed she was sitting comfortably curled up in the wide

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window seat reading "Little Women," with a beautifully innocent expression on her countenance.

Nothing was discovered for a day or two, "Pilgrim's Progress," the poets and atlas not being widely read, and each time Diana was alone she tore another book till about thirty stood to her credit. Then Mr. Wenderby went for his "Ingoldsby Legends," and his sorrow and anger at its condition were great to behold. Who was the culprit?

The four children were summoned to his presence: George aged thirteen, who was home from school, having had an attack of measles.

Victoria, aged eleven.

Drusilla, aged nine and a half.

Diana, aged seven.

Miss Tipson, the governess, accompanied them.

"No," she agreed, "it cannot be Diana, though she is *so* precocious. She is too little, her hands too tiny to have torn those thick pages; fifty have been done at once; *even* I could not have managed them."

"But I will put the question to her," said Mr. Wenderby. "Diana, did you tear this book?"

"No," replied Diana, delighted at the opportunity of committing so grave a sin as telling a lie. Something ought to happen now.

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"You may go," said her father, which she did, and promptly went upstairs and jumped up and down on Mrs. Wenderby's watch, hid Victoria's gold and blue enamel locket in a small hole in the carving of the wardrobe, and smashed the lid off a "Lady's Companion," Drusilla's most treasured possession — a leather box containing a thimble, scissors, and two reels of pink and blue silk — which "companion" was always kept in a drawer in Mrs. Wenderby's bedroom and allowed out to Drusilla on half holidays.

Diana was very fond of Drusilla, and it quite hurt her to smash her "Lady's Companion," but she felt impelled to continue her course of sin.

She went downstairs and found her parents in the library examining the books on the shelves with troubled faces. Dozens of torn volumes lay in a heap on the table, and as Diana entered the room she heard her father say "it is absolutely incomprehensible. All the children deny it so emphatically, and they have always been so truthful."

"Yes," returned Mrs. Wenderby, "but who, then, can be the culprit? It is absurd even to consider the possibility of the servants committing such an act, and that only leaves Miss Tipson."

"You have not observed any symptoms of mania

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in the last?" inquired Mr. Wenderby thoughtfully.

"Certainly not"; Mrs. Wenderby spoke with decision. How can you suggest such a thing? And, oh, Henry, do look at our 'Pickwick'; isn't it in a dreadful condition?"

"And such a favourite of mine," said poor Mr. Wenderby, sadly; and Diana stole away, without having been observed, feeling quite depressed and unhappy. She loved her parents and hated to cause them pain.

A few hours later the broken watch was discovered. Diana was being put to bed at the time.

"Isn't it awful, Miss Diana?" asked the nurse, as she screwed her hair up into tight curl rags. "Your poor ma is cryin' about her watch. It was given to her by her father. I heard her tellin' Miss Tipson about it."

"Don't," cried the child impulsively, covering her face with her hands. She had much ado to keep from crying, she felt so sorry for her mother. "I will say my prayers to myself to-night, nurse," she added; "will you tell mother she needn't come?" She knelt down at the side of the bed — a small white figure, with her curl rags sticking out from her dark head like so many horns.

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"But who'll put your candle out?" the nurse protested.

"I'll put it out myself, you needn't be frightened. I'll be very careful, and won't set my nightdress on fire. But, if you're afraid, you can come back in a few minutes."

"Perhaps I'd better wait."

"No," said Diana, "I want to be quite by myself. Please go."

"You are a funny child, Miss Diana," said the nurse, moving reluctantly toward the door.

"You have heard Miss Tipson say that," returned the child with dignity. "And you are much funnier. I saw the butcher boy tickling you this morning, and you seemed to like it."

And the nurse fled.

"Pray God bless father and mother, sisters and brother, Miss Tipson, the servants, Job and all my kind friends, and make me a good girl, for Christ's sake Amen," Diana repeated mechanically, and then: "Oh, God, it is difficult being quite so wicked, and telling lies, and breaking dear mother's watch which was given to her by her father; but I *do* want to make my sins scarlet enough and big enough so that you will turn them into white snow if I am sorry enough, and I *am* sorry. O Lord, it quite hurts me inside, and I



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*do* surrender myself to Thee, though I don't quite know what it means, and I do believe; help Thou mine unbelief. And please, dear Lord, be quick and work the miracle because I am so unhappy and tired of being wicked. And please comfort dear father and mother and make us all angels when we die. Amen." A little happier, Diana blew out the candle and crept into bed.

Later, when Drusilla came, they lay and talked of the broken watch and torn books.

"I believe it's the devil," announced Drusilla, with such suddenness that Diana nearly fell out of bed. Here was she aspiring to be an angel and Drusilla likened her unconsciously to a devil.

"But devils must be useful or God wouldn't have made them," she argued tentatively.

"He didn't; they made themselves," said Drusilla with finality; and Diana, being her junior by two and a half years, thought it wiser not to contradict.

The following day, being Sunday, Drusilla went to the drawer in Mrs. Wenderby's room for her "Lady's Companion," and suddenly a loud howl rent the silence of the house. Diana, being prepared for this, was first on the scene. Drusilla was sitting on the floor rocking herself backward

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and forward, hugging what was left of her "Lady's Companion," to her heart.

"Oh, oh!" she cried; "the devil."

"Hush," commanded her parents, who had torn up the stairs on hearing the cry. "What's the matter, Drusilla?"

"Look, my 'Lady's Companion,'" wailed Drusilla, holding out the broken remains to them. "It *must* be the devil, mother. Mustn't it, father?"

Mr. Wenderby looked perplexed. "I really don't know, Drusilla; I can't explain it — I ——"

Another cry rent the house. This time it was Victoria. She had discovered the loss of her blue enamel locket.

"It must be there," said Mrs. Wenderby, trying to be comforting. "It must be in your jewel case. I will come and help you to look. Be quiet Drusilla. Stop making that noise."

They all trooped to Victoria's room, and Diana helped in the search; she never looked so hard for anything in her life as she did for that locket. She emptied out the jewel case, went down on hands and knees and searched under the bed, examined all the drawers, but without any success; and all the time the blue locket was peeping at everybody from the hole in the carving of the

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wardrobe, and Diana felt curiously uplifted, although she was sorry for Victoria, down whose usually placid face the tears were running.

"It must be George," said Mr. Wenderby, suddenly. "It isn't the girls and it can't be the servants, so it *must* be George."

"Oh, no," objected Mrs. Wenderby, covering her face with her hands, "it couldn't be."

George was the only boy. Her face quivered, but she suppressed her emotion.

"Who then can it be?" Mr. Wenderby patted his wife's hand gently.

"I don't know," she replied a little helplessly, "but I am sure it isn't George."

"Where is he?"

"He's gone for a walk with Tommie Sutherland," volunteered Drusilla.

"Well, when he returns he must be questioned," said Mr. Wenderby; "we must get to the bottom of this."

But they didn't. Later George was put through a searching examination and left the room with his eyes blazing with righteous indignation.

On the morning following, Job, the gardener, reported somebody had thrown his shears down the well, and what was he to do, as he wanted to use them?

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"Gardeners have no resources," observed Mr. Wenderby with unwonted irritation; "tell him to fish them out." Diana was much amused at this reply. She was not partial to Job, he told tales when she went on to the flower beds, or pumped on the broody hens to stop their being broody.

A couple of days later the housemaid gave notice to leave. Ink had been found on the dining-room tablecloth, and a hole cut in one of the curtains. Servants are always morbidly sensitive. No one had accused her of destructiveness; why then give notice? Mrs. Wenderby asked. And the girl sobbed into her apron, repeating incoherently she would rather leave, as she was sure there was a ghost about the house.

And, by this time, Diana herself had become ill from the strain she was undergoing. She prayed and prayed and wrestled in prayer, and still her sins, now huge red patches, totally obscured her mental vision. There was no sign of any snow; white, or otherwise. No miracle took place before her eyes. She had no assurance of one day becoming an angel; in fact the conviction began to overtake her that everlasting damnation would be her portion; the flames of hell fire danced before her feverish eyes. She started when she was spoken to, she refused her food, her sleep was

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restless and troubled. Had not Mr. and Mrs. Wenderby been so engaged in searching after the doer of evil in their house, they must have seen that their little daughter was becoming seriously ill.

And a night came when Diana felt she could stand the strain no longer, and she must confess her sins to her parents. The Lord had failed her, nothing had happened as promised by the author of "Christie's Old Organ," and nothing ever would, she now believed. And what if her parents failed her too? Her heart stood still at the very thought. What if they misunderstood her high motive for jumping on her mother's watch and tearing her father's valuable books to ribbons? What if she failed to make them see that she had sinned in order to become an angel.

Restlessly she turned over and over in her little bed; she could not sleep. Presently she begged Drusilla to tell her a story. Drusilla's stories were always so satisfactory — right triumphed over wrong, each ended with a moral clearly defined. They were a sort of "Sandford and Merton" story, and Diana always enjoyed them, because, perhaps, she was so naughty herself.

To-night Drusilla's story was of a little girl named Louisa, who had curls and wore a beautiful

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velvet frock with a lace collar and a blue sash. Louisa was usually very good, but one day she told a lie, a very bad lie. She said she had not helped herself to some jam in the cupboard and she had, and her mother knew that she had, because there was a jam mark on her velvet frock. Her mother, therefore, read to Louisa out of the Bible — all Drusilla's mothers read out of the Bible to their erring children, and she always felt glad in her secret heart that her own mother did nothing of the kind. Just at this point she went to sleep. Drusilla could go to sleep, Diana asserted, in the middle of anything. Now, she was left alone with her own dark thoughts. She longed to know if Louisa confessed, but Drusilla refused to wake up and tell her. If she only knew she felt it would be a guide to her own conduct. She turned her hot pillow, she eased her curl rags, which to-night were unusually hard and chestnut-like; she wriggled and twisted from one side of the bed to the other. How slowly the time passed. Ten o'clock struck. Her parents would be up at half past — people in the country went to bed early. Diana began to arrange what she should say — she had now definitely made up her mind to confess, she could bear the weight of her own sins no longer. Somebody must share them with

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her. She had no fear of her father and mother, no fear of punishment; indeed, she felt she deserved it. Diana always had the faculty of seeing two sides to a question; but what she did fear was the improbability of their seeing *her* side. If she said, "I told you a lie, father, in order that my sin might become as white as snow," she could well imagine his inability to see her point. He would look at her with his brows lifted in surprise. If she said, "Mother, I smashed your watch so that my soul might be saved" — but at this point she heard the sound of her mother's silk dress along the passage. They were coming. They were outside the door — they came in each night, Diana knew, though she was generally asleep, to see that the clothes were properly tucked in at their backs — and no one could tuck in clothes like their mother — and now all her explanations and well-marshalled arguments fell from her like leaves from a tree — she was just a little girl, an ordinary, sane, and very unhappy little girl clinging to her mother, arms round her neck, sobbing wildly and incoherently: "Mother dear, *I* tore the books, *I* smashed your watch and Drusilla's 'Lady's Companion,' *I* hid Victoria's locket, *I* did everything. Yes, *I* did. Father, I told you a lie and — and I'm sorry, oh, I'm so sorry.

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Will you ever forgive me?" The tears were streaming down her white little cheeks — "I did it all so as to have sins like snow and become an angel same as in 'Christie's Old Organ.' Oh, I can't explain, and I'm so tired — " She was drooping toward the bed exhausted, worn out, pale as death.

The Wenderbys were wise parents. They asked no questions — to-night. They carried her to their own bed, and she lay between them a hand in each of theirs, and gradually they soothed her till the little sobbing, twitching frame was quiet, and she was asleep.

And the next day Doctor Wantage was summoned. He frowned, and grunted, and swore beneath his breath as he stared into the big eyes with their widely dilated pupils, and felt the hot, feverish hand and quickened pulse.

"She's just escaped brain fever," he said down in the library, "if she has escaped. What have you been doing to her, or what haven't you been doing? H-m! That's just the point. You haven't noticed that she's imaginative, highly strung, precocious beyond her years? You *have* noticed, and yet you have allowed her to read any or every thing that's come in her way, when



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she's little more than a babe. You've allowed her to go to Methodist Revivalist meetings with her nurse and sing Moody and Sankey's hymns, when she should be shouting 'Little Miss Muffet' and 'Three Blind Mice.' You've permitted her to worry herself about heaven and hell, when her only heaven should be her mother's arms ——" He stopped, overcome with his own wrath, and walked up and down the room with angry strides. Doctor Wantage was a friend as well as a physician to the Wenderby family. He had brought the four little Wenderbys into the world, and he admired, respected, and liked their parents above most people; and now Mrs. Wenderby's eyes of mute anguish touched him to the roots of his rough, kindly old heart: "I'm sorry, forgive me." He ceased his perambulations and stood in front of her. "You're generally so wise that I expect too much — but you've gone wrong here."

"I know," Mrs. Wenderby spoke humbly. "Diana we've always felt was beyond us, and — we trusted to luck."

"And your luck's turned round on you — don't risk it again. That child will make a fine woman if you give her a chance. She's chock full of — well, of possibilities — and she's got grit in her if ever a girl had. Let her run wild for a year or

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two, let her play, run, fish, bathe — anything but lessons or books. No church, no Bible, no religion. She will grow up a heathen, you may say, and that's all right. She's good at bottom and will never go far wrong. Give her plenty of milk and nourishing food, and make her go to bed early. And I think that's all. Good-by." He wrung the hands of the two depressed parents and departed.

## CHAPTER II

So, for a couple of years, Diana Wenderby "ran wild" and grew hearty and strong, and one day with her was very much the same as the last.

Twelve o'clock always saw her at the school room door waiting for Drusilla, in her hand two old battered tin cans — the sort of can with raw edges one meets in a ditch in conjunction with old boots and rags; and together the sisters went to a rubbish heap to dig for worms. Digging for worms was an unfailing delight to both, and to secure the longest and fattest lob a rubbish heap composed of old lawn grass and rotting leaves and soil all damp and juicy could possibly yield was the ambition of each. Afterward the worms were well washed beneath the pump in the stable yard, measured on a clean dry flag — Drusilla invariably had the longest — and then given to the fowls.

Another amusement which never palled was fishing in Crabbe's pond. Crabbe's pond was very ordinary as ponds go. No waving flags

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or reeds encircled its banks, no water lilies graced its surface, no little coots dived suddenly to its depths; it was not even large. It was, in fact, just a small, rather muddy pond, but to Drusilla and Diana delectable beyond description. For hours, on half holidays, they would sit perched on its rough, grassless banks, fishing rods in hands — fishing rods cut by Job, when in a gracious mood, from one of the tall elm trees in the garden — hooks baited with bread mixed with cotton-wool and scented with whisky, coaxed from Mr. Wenderby, to attract bites, waiting for the fish which never or scarcely ever came along. Once Diana caught a tench three inches in length which she and Drusilla cooked in an outbuilding where there was a fireplace usually devoted to the boiling of pig and fowl food. Diana coaxed some fat from the cook — she had a way of getting around servants, perhaps because she treated them with genuine camaraderie and never with condescension, which lasted through her life. Servants had been heard to say they would “die for Miss Diana.”

“Don’t use all the fat,” she commanded; “I have something else to cook as a second course.” She produced something from her pocket wrapped in a handkerchief.

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"What is it?" asked Drusilla, with curiosity.

Diana opened the handkerchief and displayed a thin, rather dried-up looking frog. "People in France eat frogs. I heard father say so yesterday, so I caught this one."

"Ugh!" said Drusilla.

"I don't fancy it myself," said Diana truthfully. "But some day we might be wrecked on a desert island and be glad of them."

"Couldn't we wait till we got there?" asked Drusilla, eying the frog with ill-concealed disgust.

"I think we ought to be prepared. Is the fish ready?" They sat down on two inverted buckets, and a wheelbarrow served as their table.

"I don't much care for tench," said Drusilla critically; "it tastes of mud."

"Perhaps you'd like it better if you'd caught it yourself. I have noticed people often like their own things — even when they're horrid." Diana had a way of jumping at elemental facts without having given them any thought or consideration.

She rose and dropped the remainder of the fat into the frying pan, as she had seen the cook do. "It doesn't boil till it stops sputtering," volunteered Drusilla.

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"Now." The frog went in with a plop, and the fat rose and sent some scalding drops in Diana's face, but she did not flinch. She had been too much in the company of George and Tommie Sutherland to flinch at trifles.

"I think it's done," she announced presently. "I'll cut it down the middle."

"You have it all," said Drusilla unselfishly. "I've had enough," she yawned carelessly.

"Drusilla," Diana's voice was stern, "you are trying to escape this frog. I know you are. I believe you are frightened of it. French people eat frogs, and we're not going to be beaten by foreigners."

"But I'm not hungry."

"You were hungry a moment ago. That teeny bit of fish couldn't have filled you up. We'll start together and be quite fair. Are you ready?"

"Yes." Poor Drusilla's voice was faint.

Diana closed her eyes and with a gulp swallowed her portion whole — bones and all, and she opened them to find that Drusilla had basely tossed hers into the fire.

With a scream Diana sprang to her feet and smacked her sister on the head. She adored Drusilla, but she so often failed Diana at the

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critical moments of life, and Diana never failed any human being. If she said she would do a thing, she did it; and Drusilla's weather-cock propensities never ceased to surprise and annoy her.

She left the outbuilding in a white heat, and nearly tumbled over Miss Tipson.

"What have you been doing?" Miss Tipson invariably felt that Diana had been guilty of some malpractice.

"Eating a frog." At which Miss Tipson screamed so loudly that Diana felt impelled to drop the key of the door down her back, and then took some minutes to recover it.

She felt tired of women folk and wandered away to the strawberry and lettuce beds to look for snails. She didn't want the snails, but she *did* want a bull's eye. For every dozen snails the Wenderby children collected Mr. Wenderby presented them with a bull's eye peppermint from a large bottle kept in the dining-room side-board. He didn't trouble to count the snails, but put the children on their honour to report a correct number.

The strawberry bed proved fruitful this afternoon, and in a very short space of time Diana had a couple of dozen snails standing to her

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credit, which she threw to the ducks and then claimed her reward. Next, with a very potent bull's eye stuck in either cheek, she climbed a sycamore tree which commanded a good view of the back lane. There had been a time when the Wenderby children had been allowed to play in the back lane, to skip and play hopscotch and jackstones with the village children on their way to and from the National Schools. When Mr. Wenderby was inclined to protest at such intercourse, Mrs. Wenderby said it would do the children no possible harm. Mrs. Wenderby was broad in her views, her one great desire in the training of her children being to keep them unpriggish.

"But they will pick up bad words, and catch things," Mr. Wenderby objected.

"What sort of things?"

"Measles, whooping cough."

"If the children are to have measles, well — they'll have them."

Mr. Wenderby gave in to his wife, as he usually did; and the children played in the lane, which seemed strange considering they had an acre of their own garden in which to disport themselves; but then the lane had a ditch on one side with a little stream running down it, and the afore-



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said school children taught the Wenderbys how to play marbles, and gave them fascinating alleys and blood-alleys in return for apples and pears.

But one day Drusilla rapped out a most fearful oath when Miss Tipson was doing her hair and pulling at her unruly tangled curls. It would be lacking restraint to transcribe the oath, for it was peculiarly lurid, and had been picked up from a fisherman's boy. Miss Tipson, ever faithful to duty, reported this breach of language to Mrs. Wenderby, and — the children played in the lane no more.

"So careless of you," Diana said to Drusilla. "*I* know heaps of bad words. I say them over to myself in bed at night so as I shan't forget them, but I've never said them aloud."

She was thinking of Drusilla's unguardedness now as she climbed the sycamore tree. There was no one to play with. Victoria was out with Mrs. Wenderby. Drusilla, she was not friends with. George was at school. Tommie Sutherland was — why, here was Tommie himself coming along the lane with a pail of mussels in his hand. Diana felt glad. *Anybody* would cause a little relaxation, but she suppressed her feelings.

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"Hallo!" said Tommie.

"Hallo!" returned Diana.

Tommie paused and looked up at her.

"You haven't raised your cap," said Diana reproachfully, "and mother says you've such nice manners."

"Sorry." Tommie went red, put down his pail and fumbled with his cap.

"May I come up and sit with you, Diana?" he asked, recovering himself.

"There's no room."

"Oh, I could squeeze in, or sit on the branch above. And I've got some mussels."

Diana wavered.

"They're fine big chaps. I'll give you some." She capitulated.

In a couple of shakes, the boy, with the agility of a monkey, was up in the tree, on the branch just above Diana, while she held on to his boots to preserve his balance as, with a knife, he skilfully opened the mussels.

"You don't mind them raw?" he asked admiringly as one slipped down her throat.

"We eat oysters raw, and I've just had a frog." She told him of Drusilla's perfidy, but he looked uncomfortable when she added that she had slapped her sister over the head. Tom-

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mie had strict ideas of his own as to what girls should do, and what they shouldn't. He was devoted to Diana, she was so quick, so bright, so reliable, and so altogether companionable. But he wished, at times, she was gentler and more like a little girl. Tommie was of the type of boy and man — and it is the best type — who likes to take care of women. Diana refused to be taken care of, and her self-reliance and fearlessness often vexed him.

He opened several more mussels for her, then he screwed up his courage: "I don't think it's nice of girls to hit each other."

"Don't you, Tommie?" Diana's voice was of an airy indifference.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because they're girls, that's all."

Diana swung her brown legs to and fro. It seemed a foolish reason and not worth consideration. Girls had their grievances to settle the same as boys, and, to her, there seemed but one practical way, and no other. There was silence for some little time, for a pedlar with brushes and baskets for sale came down the lane, which he offered to any chance passer-by in a sing-song voice. He absorbed Diana's attention.

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Drusilla often said that Diana would be interested in a dead monkey tree if there were nothing more exciting in the landscape.

Tommie screwed up his courage again. "Diana, do you think I could stay to tea?"

"You were here twice last week," she returned inhospitably.

His face dropped. "I don't eat much."

"You'd seven pieces of bread and butter last time, and three of cake; I counted them."

"I wouldn't mind if you'd twenty if you came to tea with me, so long as you didn't burst," he said with heat. "Besides, I'm lonely at home."

At once she softened. "I'm sorry, Tommie; of course, you can come; I was only teasing," she patted his muddy boots, "and here's a piece of gum." With musselly fingers she extracted a piece of sticky gum from the fork of the tree and stretching up put it into his mouth.

"Do you — like me, Diana?" he said gratefully.

"Well, not frightfully," she said honestly, "but, of course, as you're George's friend, I — I ——" She searched about for something soothing. "I make the best of you. But I don't care much about boys, they're bossy and dirty."

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"Well, your pinafore's not very clean," said Tommie indignantly.

"I carried snails in it to the ducks, and I didn't say *you* were dirty. Tommie," suddenly she became gentle and persuasive, "Tommie, will you let me go some day to the shore with you to pick mussels? Mother won't let me go alone — and sometimes it's lonely since my religious mania."

"*Rather*," his whole face lit up, "and I'll take great care of you."

"You needn't do that, I'm not a little girl," said she nettled. "You're only four years older than me."

"Five," he corrected.

"But I'm nearly eight."

"And I'm nearly thirteen."

"You don't look it," said Diana critically, "you're small and thin. And there's the tea bell." She scrambled down the tree, covering her pinafore and frock with green from the trunk. "Aren't you coming?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"You say I'm thin and small."

"Well, so you are; you can't help it."

"Grandfather says I'll shoot up all in a minute — my father was six feet."

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"You'll have to look sharp, then,"

He turned his back on her.

"Come on, Tommie."

He did not move.

"Come on, Tommie dear. I'm sorry. Mother says you're the nicest boy she knows. She's always praising you, and is so sorry you're an orphan, and — so am I. It must be beastly having no father and mother. I—I should cry oceans. Come on Tommie."

Tommie never had and never could quarrel with Diana for long. Dropping to the ground as lightly as an acorn, he put his arm through hers, and together they went down the long, charming garden and into the house.

### CHAPTER III

The Wenderbys' house was long and low and white, and of no particular architecture, for a wing had been added here, and a window and door there. It had started out to be Queen Anne, the original windows were of that period; then somebody tacked on a Georgian bit, and another a Tudor, and a third a Gothic. A connoisseur would have wept over it, but to the uneducated, the result was wholly charming.

A wistaria clambered over one side of the house, and a japonica and jargonelle pear fought for the west wall; whilst the back, which was northeast, was divided between a white jessamine and a flowering ivy.

The garden was rambling, and not what one might describe as well-balanced or orderly.

Job contended that vegetables should be kept to themselves, flowers to themselves, and fruits to themselves. Covent Garden would have delighted his soul. Mr. and Mrs. Wenderby willed it otherwise. Next to their children the

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garden was their greatest source of happiness, and if they liked to see patches of scarlet poppies in the potato bed, and Canterbury bells rubbing shoulders with Brussels sprouts, that was their business.

About the front of the house they were more amenable. This was given over entirely to flowers which flanked a sloping piece of grass of fine and exquisite texture—and the place in summer was a blaze of colour. On either side of the grass was a gravel path, and beyond—to right and left—were shrubbery beds filled with flowering currants, brooms, pyracanthus, arbutus trees, small double cherries, and a host of flowering bushes; and beyond again were trees of great age: oaks, sycamores, chestnuts and beeches. The house was approached from the road by four long, low, moss-covered steps, and two wrought-iron gates. Mrs. Wenderby's neighbours wondered why the moss was not scraped away and the steps nicely whitened. Mrs. Oldfield, the rector's wife, had even ventured to suggest that this should be done. "Moss is slippery and dangerous," she said, with a pleasant smile. "Your trees shade the gateway too much. Somebody might slip."

"There is no moss where we tread," Mrs.



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Wenderby's voice was slightly stiff; "the children's feet running in and out have worn it away."

"And do you like it?" The rector's wife frequently rushed in where angels feared to tread.

"Very much, thank you." Mrs. Wenderby was too courteous to rise — the rector's wife was paying her an afternoon call, but Mrs. Oldfield felt she had been dismissed.

"Queer woman," she remarked afterward to Mr. Oldfield; "not exactly eccentric, but unusual."

"I like her," said that good gentleman; "I've always liked her. Hers is a fine and rare intelligence, and she's nice, and a good friend."

"H'm!" Mrs. Oldfield could express volumes in her h'ms. "Anyway, their place will be a swamp if they don't look out — far too many trees for health."

"They've lived there for fifteen years," said the rector mildly, "and they seem strong and well enough. I think their garden is lovely. I always have the feeling when I walk up those moss-grown steps and the iron gates clang to behind me, and then up the little sharp slope with the rockeries on either side full of ferns and periwinkles and — and bluebells, and on

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and on till the lawn with its wealth of flowers bursts upon you, and the long white house with its wistaria and scarlet japonica beyond, that I—I am in some enchanted country.”

Mr. Oldfield rarely made so long a speech; his two sermons on Sunday exhausted his elocutionary powers for the remainder of the week. And he now spread his handkerchief over his face, leant back in his roomy armchair, and prepared to sleep. He had finished with the Wenderbys' garden for to-day.

When Mr. and Mrs. Wenderby “found” Heatherland on the banks of the Dee, with its sandy, tortuous lanes, stretches of gorse and heather, red sandstone hills, mild, beautiful air, dales filled with bracken, banks filled with primroses and violets, fields yellow with cowslips and kingcups, and the river Dee stretching away like a shining silver ribbon to the feet of the blue range of mountains in Wales, they looked into each others eyes and smiled, and when Mrs. Wenderby smiled Mr. Wenderby never forgot to think of a sunrise, tender and beautiful, he had once seen on the Lake of Lucerne on a morning of May.

Then when they had “found” Moss Deeping, they said simply: “This will do.”

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They wasted no words, they wasted no time. Within a couple of months Moss Deeping was theirs, and they were settled in.

"You will grow strong and well in this garden, in this air, in this beauty," said Mrs Wenderby. "You — you would have died in town, Henry." Her lips trembled on the words. She loved her husband, and she had nearly lost him. Had she lost him her life would have been ended. She would have been brave, but still it would have been ended. "I am glad you have enough money to do — nothing. You won't be dull?"

"Dull! And you?"

"Never," she laughed. "I have the garden, and books, and — my husband."

And later, there were the four children. "Four is such a nice number," they often said to each other; "nothing could be nicer. They were a singularly contented couple. A stronger and more ambitious man than Mr. Wenderby might have asked for more and been less happy. Happiness means contentment with what you have got. Mr. Wenderby, owing to an affection of the heart, was *obliged* to take life very gently. All excitement was denied to him. A quiet rubber of whist with old Mr. Sutherland, Mr. Oldfield, and either his wife or Mrs. Oldfield;

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an occasional game of bowls, a drive, a brief visit to the nearest town seven miles away, a walk along the Common, and a stroll round his beloved garden, were the extent of his dissipations; and yet he was happy. For the rush of life he had no desire; the mad tumbling one over another of his friends in their pursuit of so-called pleasure left him amazed.

"Is this life?" he asked his wife one day. "They have no time to read — to think, to see, to feel. Is it life?"

"No," said Mrs. Wenderby with decision, "it isn't." And she was right, it wasn't.

Theirs *was* life, and lived to the uttermost. Yet for fear they might become groovy, once a year they went away for a long holiday. They wandered in idle and desultory fashion about the Continent, and saw things in their own characteristic fashion. They were bad sight-seers. When people said, "You must go to the Dolomites," they knew they shouldn't. When they were advised to see a famous old monastery, they went for a walk in an olive grove. When they were told they *must* see a particular view, they visited a picture gallery. But they enjoyed themselves, and when they returned to Moss Deeping they loved it more than ever.

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A word must be said here of Miss Tipson, the old and valued governess of the Wenderbys — that is to say, of Mr. and Mrs. Wenderby. The little Wenderbys did not value her in the least, they just bore with her as they bore mustard poultices, and Gregory powders, and pains in their insides. They bore her with philosophy. Drusilla and Diana realized that they *had* to learn lessons from somebody, so they might as well learn them from Miss Tipson, of whom they knew the worst, as from anybody else. Victoria was always more tractable than the other two, easier to get on with, less assertive. Perhaps she felt the gravity of her position as eldest sister, and desired that her influence in the home should be a good one. She was, in fact, to put it briefly, a good girl, who did her lessons nicely, was punctual, methodical, neat and orderly, quiet in her manner, gentle of speech, good-tempered, unforgiving to her enemies, devoid of a sense of humour, and intensely uninteresting.

"If *only* Victoria would say or do the wrong thing sometimes," said Drusilla when they were older, "I could *even* love her."

"She couldn't," returned Diana. "She strips her bed in a morning to air it. When people do that they never go wrong."

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Miss Tipson was a good teacher, thorough, conscientious, and painstaking. With the two elder girls she did well, but Diana she could teach nothing.

"I don't know how it is," she would wail to Mrs. Wenderby, "but I cannot get Diana to learn a thing. She is dreadfully ignorant." This was when Diana was about nine.

Mrs. Wenderby told her not to worry. "She will learn everything from her reading; she loves books."

"But her spelling ——"

"Never mind. That will come in time." Mrs. Wenderby, after the manner of mothers, was optimistic about her children's future. Diana *never* could spell. To the end she wrote forest with two r's.

Miss Tipson was so conscientious that she felt it to be her duty to play with the children on half holidays as well as to teach them.

To behold her playing rounders was a sight fraught with interest. She wore a short skirt, goloshes — however dry the weather — a jersey, and a round wool cap surmounted her tight frizzy fringe.

Her side would be "in." The children, whose numbers were swelled by the little Oldfields and

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Tommie Sutherland (George Wenderby was at boarding-school) when picking up sides had the utmost difficulty in hiding their desire that Miss Tipson should be on the other side. She always sent balls that could be caught, screamed when she ran, and altogether displayed an excitement which aroused the contempt of her juniors.

"Play!" Diana is bowling, a frenzied movement, and Miss Tipson receives the ball plump in her chest. "Have another," the children cry in generous spirit. A low, slow ball this time and in her effort to reach it Miss Tipson nearly falls flat on her face.

"Another," and this time poor Miss Tipson succeeds in hitting the ball a couple of yards, makes a wild run like an excited, flurried hen to the first post and is "caught out."

At hide-and-seek she fares better, for nobody tries to find her, so she gains the den in peace and comfort.

Poor Miss Tipson — so well meaning and so ineffectual.

But she took it out of her pupils during their music lessons, when her temper — quite an average one — became almost violent.

On one occasion she so lost control of herself that she hit Diana on the head with a hard black

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ruler for thumping the bars in a duet of "Home to Our Mountains."

"I can't hear Drusilla at all!" she shouted.

"You've not missed much. She's making so many mistakes. I'm making this noise to drown them."

"That's a story," said Drusilla, and as she was her governess's favourite, Miss Tipson believed her. And Diana, becoming annoyed at the favouritism shown, unexpectedly put on the soft pedal whilst scarcely touching the keys down in the bass, and Drusilla's mistakes were revealed in their entirety. "Besides," Diana added, "I don't think you ought to hit people on the head with a ruler, because they might have concussion of the brain and die" — she spoke earnestly and quite respectfully — "and then you'd be hanged by the neck till you were dead yourself, and your heels" — warming to her subject — "would go round and round in the air just like meat on a jack before the fire." Her graphic picture caused Miss Tipson to feel so faint that she forgot to punish her.

One more recollection of the Wenderbys' childish days: Drusilla was of a curiously nervous temperament; she was frightened of anything and everything, whilst Diana feared nothing.



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Each night Drusilla looked under her bed, forgetting Diana's, which the younger sister thought very careless on her part, as a man might as easily have been hiding beneath it as beneath Drusilla's. Then Drusilla peeped fearfully into the wardrobe and cupboard, and dived down the bedclothes at the slightest untoward sound, leaving Diana perhaps in the midst of a thrilling story, and talking into space, and not discovering the position till Drusilla would emerge breathless, and ask her to begin all over again.

"You *are* a baby," Diana said one wild windy night, when the carpet was lifting from the floor and the wind whistling down the chimney and rattling the windows; "what are you frightened of?"

"I don't know," returned Drusilla, shakily, taking off her frock and hanging it in the wardrobe with fearful backward looks into a dark corner.

Suddenly a spirit of mischief entered into Diana. "Take care," she cried, staring into the dark corner, "for there the deed was done!"

"What?" With a yell Drusilla sprang to the opposite side of the room, "Wha — t deed?"

"The bloody deed!" said Diana, in deep sepulchral tones. "Don't you see the murdered man?"

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She had that night been looking at a gruesome picture in the Christmas number of *The Graphic*: a picture of a man lying stark under the moon with his throat cut, in the gateway of an old haunted castle, a raven perched in a gaunt, bare tree close by. It was entitled: "There the deed was done."

"Can't you see his blood, Drusilla, creeping, trickling near to you, nearer — nearer?" she chanted in monotone; and, with a howl that rent the house, Drusilla fled from the room, pulling the door to behind her with frenzied hands.

Mrs. Wenderby was very angry when she heard the story — not from Drusilla, who never told tales, but from Diana herself.

"It is selfish of you and unkind. Some day you may cause Drusilla to be seriously ill, and you are fond of her?"

"Rather. I'd walk miles with bare feet on stones, same as the Pilgrims, for Drusilla" — Diana was nothing if not graphic — "and beat myself with nettles."

"Why, then, do you do such things?"

Diana sat and considered. "I don't know," she said at length; "because, I suppose, I was born horrid. I wonder why you and father

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made me the nastiest of your children. Suppose it took a long time to make anybody as good as Victoria, and you got tired."

Mrs. Wenderby lost her breath for a moment. Diana frequently caused her to feel as though she had tumbled backward into a cold bath.

"No," she said, recovering herself, "you are not horrid. You are as nice as the others" — she smiled one of, what Diana called, her dear, crinkly smiles — "but you don't think enough."

"I do," said Diana, with great solemnity. "I think so much that I nearly break in two. But I forget: I have a bad memory. Lots of people who were quite great had bad memories."

Mrs. Wenderby smiled at her child's unconscious egotism. Diana might be careless and outspoken, but she was not conceited.

## CHAPTER IV

When Diana had reached the age of sixteen the dreaded fiat went forth — she must go to school.

"We can't help it — your father and I," said Mrs. Wenderby apologetically; "you *must* go, if only for a year. You are so ignorant, Diana, dear. Miss Tipson says she can do nothing more with you, she is tired out. And your manners — "

"Manners don't make the man," cried Diana fiercely, fighting to keep her trembling lips steady, for she was to leave home on the morrow.

"They make the woman though," said Victoria, coming into the library with some work in her hand.

Victoria was now an elegant, correct, placid young woman of twenty. "Besides, I believe, you'll like school. I enjoyed it immensely, and any of the old girls who are still there and knew Drusilla and me will be nice to you for our sakes."

"I don't want them to be, I don't want your reflected glory," Diana snapped, rushing out

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of the room and falling plump into Tommie Sutherland's arms.

"Dear me, you're always in the way," she said rudely.

"I have not been here for three days," he returned aggrieved.

"It doesn't seem so long."

Tommie turned on his heel and stumped out of the house.

He was down from Oxford for the long vacation, and, as his grandfather had predicted, had shot up into a fine young man. Too thin, perhaps, but curiously lithe. Diana said, with his black hair and dark olive skin, he reminded her of a Red Indian. (She had never seen one.)

She went to the garden in search of her father, and found him in the yard washing a tiny cocoa tin beneath the pump. "For my jujubes," he said. Mr. Wenderby now had a little, dry, hacking cough which never left him, and which filled his wife with an unknown dread of she knew not what, or would not allow herself to think.

"Father, dear, come for a walk. Here's your stick. And when we return I want you to shake me some apples from the tree in the 'High Place'." (This was on the uppermost slope of the garden at the back.)

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She linked her arm through his and silently they passed through the front gates, down the moss-grown steps, up the lane and over the Common — a blaze of purple and gold — down the little sandy path of the dale, brushing the bracken — shoulder-high on either side — till they reached the shore.

The tide was in and the water was wonderfully blue, unusually so; for water, when running in over sand, is mostly brown and gray. Beyond the blue was the range of Welsh hills, violet at its summit, green at its base, with little white threads of smoke rising straight upward in the still air from the passing trains which crawled like snakes in and out of the valleys.

Finding a smooth, warm patch of sand, Diana and Mr. Wenderby sat down with their backs against the low sandy cliffs.

With knitted brows and eyes suspiciously bright, Diana looked around at the old dear familiar scene: at the little brown-sailed fishing boats; at the group of rocks just showing above the water where she and Tommie, at low tide, searched for mussels, winkles, and small crabs; at the gulls wheeling and circling, and dropping, of a sudden, noiselessly on to the sea; at the fields in the rear with their short, crisp grass and pink scabious and tiny mauve convolvulus and yellow vetches

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sweetening the air around; at the old church with its square, solid, ivy-clad tower nestling in a hollow, and at Moss Deeping itself, which could just be discerned above a line of dark trees, distant though it was, owing to the sun, which was near to setting, having caught its long western windows and reflecting in them its own wondrous light.

Suddenly a sob broke from Diana. "Father, it's difficult going to school," she said brokenly.

Gently he patted her hand. Diana was very dear to him, dearer, though he knew it not, than any of his other children. "But your sisters liked it." His words failed to comfort.

"*I* like chewing gum from the damson trees and *you* don't," said Diana succinctly. "I know I shall loathe school."

"But why, my daughter?"

"Father, would you like to have been a girl — a woman?"

"No, I don't think I should." Mr. Wenderby spoke with gentle emphasis.

"Exactly" — Diana smiled through her tears — "and that is how I feel. It is not exhilarating being a girl at any time, though I have had a better time than most — because of Tommie. But going to school is" — she searched round for

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a word sufficiently expressive — “hell. To begin with, I am going to live in a vile seaside town without any sea, and roads all white and neat and flat as a billiard table — yes, I know you’re trying to get in a word to correct me about what I’ve just said, but I’m not sorry for it, for school *will* be h — , well anathema. I know it will, for look how Victoria and Drusilla have deteriorated. Drusilla will improve again because she’s all right at bottom, but at present — this is how she talks.” Diana closed her eyes and put her head on one side: “‘Oh, my dear, how sw — eet, how perfectly divine of you! Isn’t George Alexander perfectly divine, *so* handsome! What a perfectly darling hat you are wearing. Where *did* you get it? I call it toppin’, simply rippin’, don’t you, mummie darlin’.’ Now Drusilla never called mother ‘mummie darlin’ till she went to school, or rot like that. And she’s always pulling her belt down in the front and up at the back and frizgigging at her hair, and examining herself at the glass, and she’s *even* bought a box of powder and it’s all over the place.” Diana finished with a groan, and dug her heels hard into the sand in front of her.

“Drusilla would have done just the same if she had never gone to school,” said Mr. Wenderby



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mildly. "Don't you understand she's just discovered she's a woman — young, beautiful, and attractive? She's feeling her feet, so to speak, stretching out eager arms to something she knows not what. *I* know what it is, but she doesn't. And that is the beautiful part of youth"—he spoke dreamily and as though Diana were not there — "it knows so little of life, is so innocent, so tremblingly eager to drink its cup, to acquire knowledge, is so confident, so trustful that the gods will be kind, so full of hope for the future — the young always live in the future — and then a day comes, sooner or later, to most, when something tells them — perhaps it is sorrow, a sudden bereavement, disappointment, disillusionment, an incurable disease, shame for somebody beloved, poverty — that *life* for them is over and only *existence* remains. And some are brave and cheerfully make the best of existence; they don't like it, they don't enjoy it, they would prefer life — pulsating, glorious life — and who would not? for the desire of happiness is put into the heart of each of us. But, as I say, some are brave, and philosophy comes to their aid. 'We have got to live,' perhaps they whisper to themselves, 'or rather exist. It would be cowardly to go out and end it all, and there may be something

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yet for us to do. That is it. We have never *done* anything, we have only *been*. Now we must *do*.'” Mr. Wenderby’s voice sank into silence, his eyes dreamy and “inward-looking” were on the distant hills in Wales. He had forgotten the eager, pulsing, *living* little daughter at his side, he had forgotten where he was, he was unaware that the warm, beautiful September sunshine was gently beating down on to his uncovered head — a head now tinged with gray.

Diana trickled the warm, dry sand through her brown fingers, then she drew squares in front of her with the point of her toe, then she trickled more sand. She wanted to hear about the others who were “not brave,” what *they* did when life ended for them and existence began. She knew that her life would end to-morrow, she had always known it, because she had always known she was to go to school and “be finished” some dark day. And she didn’t feel a bit brave, and she didn’t want “to do.” “To do” simply meant doing one’s duty, and nothing could be duller.

“Yes, father,” she said after a while, giving his arm a little gentle prod when she found he was not prepared to come back to the world, “go on. What about the others who are not brave,

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who have no wish to do their duty? I want to hear about them."

Mr. Wenderby gave a little start. "Oh, they? They are cowards — beneath contempt. They are chaff, encumbrances on the face of the earth. They are pestilential, their influence is for evil. Misery and discontentment follow in their train. When they die it is a blessing to the rest of mankind, and may God have mercy on their souls."

"Dear me!" said Diana, feeling suddenly uncomfortable. She didn't want to be like that in twenty-four hours' time, neither did she want to do her duty. Perhaps there was some middle course.

But Mr. Wenderby had had enough of psychology this lovely afternoon. He rose and dusted the sand from his coat. "We must be going home or we shall be late for tea and your apple-gathering. And you haven't yet given me any sound reason for your objection to going to school. I want to thrash this out." He smiled at her tenderly as she gathered a bit of white convolvulus and pinned it to the lapel of his coat. She had grown a tall, long-limbed girl, and her smooth dark head was nearly on a level with his as they paused before turning into the dale.

"*You* won't be there for one thing, father, nor

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mother, and I — I *do* so love you both.” Her voice was passionate. “I can’t tell you how I love you, and Drusilla, and my home and Heatherland. Look at it.” She waved her arm toward the sea. The tide was now beginning to recede, and as it ran out swiftly, patches of sand of heavenly colour were already glistening in the rosy light of the setting sun. And the sky — as Mr. Wenderby’s eyes rested upon it, he softly repeated, “‘Tis like a sea of glory, which spreads from pole to pole,’ isn’t it, Diana?”

She nodded, and they passed into the little sandy path of the dale in single file, as it was too narrow for more than one at a time.

“And there will be none of this,” said Diana, brushing her cheek against the tall pungent bracken, “just straight, flat, prim, ugly walks, with about sixty girls walking crocodile, all giggling — for school girls do nothing else but giggle — and nothing to look at but back hair and big black ribbon bows.” (Diana’s own long black hair was in two tight pigtails.) “And I have to live with these sixty girls and about a dozen governesses for thirteen long weeks and never set eyes upon a boy or man.”

“But I thought you didn’t like boys or men,” opined Mr. Wenderby.

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"I like them a bit better than I did," she returned guardedly; "that is, I like them when they don't try to take care of you, and treat you as though you were a lump of sugar liable to melt at any moment."

"I suppose you mean Tommie. And that is what *I* like about him, his care of women, his chivalry and attention to them. It is so rare in these days, partly through the fault of women themselves. And remember Tommie has never had any women folk of his own. No mother, nor sisters, nor cousins, only his stern, reserved old grandfather leading a hermit's existence, and expecting poor Tommie to lead the same. I'm surprised he's as sane and sweet-natured as he is. And he has put girls and women on a pedestal, and again I say such idealizing of your sex in these days is rare." He paused and gathered a sprig of white heather and handed it to Diana — "for luck, my daughter." They walked very slowly, for the path was steep. "Yes," Mr. Wenderby continued, "Tommie is the best fellow I know, a splendid chap, and" — he hesitated, he disliked correcting his children, — "I think you have been rather rude to him of late, unconsciously, perhaps, Diana, and why I don't know. He is always good to you."

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"That's just it," she said with some heat. "It's because he's so good and polite that I get vexed with him. There was a time, father, when — when he didn't, I mean when he wasn't always wanting to do things for me. I was just a pal; he never made me feel I was only a girl. And now — well, the other afternoon we were in the library; I wanted to leave the room and I knew if I did he would bounce forward and open the door for me, so I just sat glued to my chair; besides," she added naively, "my blouse was undone at the back — Drusilla fastens you up so badly. You see you have never known what it is to be bowed out of a room by a person you've known all your life. You feel such a silly ass — "

"Why, there's Tommie himself," interrupted Mr. Wenderby; "he's coming down the Church Hay."

"Then I will leave you," said Diana quickly. "I'm tired of Tommie. Good-by, father dear." She hopped over a stile into a field and went home by a very circuitous route, and at the top of the Lydiat Lane walked straight into Tommie again.

"Dear me, you're all over the place," she said sharply.

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"It's a free country," he returned laconically, passing on. Then he stopped, turned, and hurried after her.

"Diana, why have you grown so horrid?" he asked bluntly.

"I don't know. I — I've always been horrid."

"Not so horrid as now," he assured her with warmth.

She laughed at his plain speaking. This was more like the old Tommie, and her reserve fell from her.

"Perhaps it's because I'm going to school. Tommie, I loathe the thought of it — and they look at your letters!"

"What?" he stopped and stared at her small, angry, quivering face.

"Yes, *even* your home ones."

"But why?"

"They are afraid you will receive letters from young men."

"And why shouldn't you?"

"Can't think. Young men are so harmless." Tommie grinned.

"Will you write to me sometimes?" he asked.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Don't want to."

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"Do you never do things you don't want to?"

"Yes. I'm walking along this road with you now."

"Because you can't help it," he said coolly.

"I could run."

"I can run faster than you."

"You've grown argumentative since you've been at Oxford, and uppish too."

"You've always been both," he retorted.

"Why then do you stay with me?" she asked.

"Can't think," he laughed.

"Well here we are at home. Good-by, Tommie."

"I'm coming to dinner."

"Have you been asked?" she inquired, quickly.

"Yes, by your mother."

"Oh!" She walked up the slope and into the house. "I must go and finish my packing. Are you coming in to tea as well as dinner?"

"Yes," said Tommie firmly.

"Well, I'm going to have it in my room. See you later." And because Tommie looked hurt she felt aggrieved and angry as she ran up the stairs. Why did he always make her feel like a very bristly porcupine? Why did he make her feel small and ineffectual?

She found Drusilla in the bedroom doing her hair



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a new way and which was very becoming. Diana told her that Tommie was in the drawing-room.

"Oh," said Drusilla, with her mouth full of hairpins, "that's nothing fresh. He's in love with *you*, and doesn't want me."

"What?" Diana shouted, "and how dare you say such a thing?" And before she knew what she was doing, she had struck Drusilla with a hair brush.

"Diana!" Drusilla's cheeks were aflame as she turned and confronted her sister. "What is the matter with you?"

"I don't know. Forgive me. I'm sorry." Suddenly she collapsed, and bursting into wild tears she flung herself on to the bed.

"Is it because you're going to school?" Drusilla, always kind and forgiving, knelt beside her younger sister.

"I suppose so," said Diana brokenly. "I don't know how I am going to bear it. And, oh, I don't want to be grown-up and have — Tommie making love to me and being polite to me. He used to be so jolly. And now he's such a bore, and his moustache is like — like a baby's brush."

"It will grow," said Drusilla comfortingly. "Two or three years make an astonishing difference in a young Oxford man."

## CHAPTER V

And Diana got into trouble more or less on the very evening of her arrival at Miss Bub's high-class boarding school for young ladies, situated at Northport in Lancashire.

She was summoned to "the presence" after the five o'clock tea, and found a large capacious lady in black silk seated on a red rep, early-Victorian sofa. She had thin hair parted down the middle, and, the parting having become scant and wide, revealed a good deal of unattractive scalp. At her throat, fastening her white tucker, was a large cameo brooch, and she wore black alpaca slippers with square kid toes. She had not appeared at tea, that meal being presided over by Miss Pilbank, the senior English governess.

"Pray be seated." Miss Bub spoke in a soothing voice as though wishful of putting her new pupil at her ease, and Diana sank into an armchair, twining one long black leg around the other beneath it.

"Don't curl up," commanded Miss Bub.

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"Undo your legs, Diana. Young ladies should sit straight up with their feet in front of them. That's better."

Diana now understood why Victoria always sat so primly with her two feet planted in front of her, neatly and firmly and exactly matching.

Then began an examination of her knowledge, raking and deadly. As far as Diana afterward recollected she answered two questions correctly: the date of the Battle of Waterloo, and the capital of Persia, and she had been unaware that she knew the latter.

"You will go into the second class, Diana," announced Miss Bub at length, "simply because of your height; otherwise you would be placed with the youngest girls in the school."

"I shouldn't mind," Diana spoke amiably and with a pleasant smile. She felt somehow that her principal was suffering for her, and she was anxious to help her and put her at her ease.

"I shouldn't mind being with *quite* little girls, because then the lessons might be easy."

"And have you no ambition? You are not in the least like Victoria and Drusilla."

"No?" returned Diana, "and yet we have the same parents."

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"You can go," said Miss Bub, wiping her face with her handkerchief, and Diana, feeling she had made a bad start, went and got a large red apple from her tuck box to comfort her. This was an infringement of the rules, she discovered later on by the aid of a governess. And it must have taken her nearly a week to grasp that practically everything, save sleeping and breathing, was against the rules.

As George had been heard to say, there were times when even the Wenderbys were dull.

It was on the afternoon of the second day that Diana earned for herself the eternal dislike of Miss Pilbank, who usually entertained quite Christian feelings toward her pupils and fellow creatures.

Diana had become tired of the Petition of Rights, and turning to her neighbour, a very pretty girl named Katherine Carruthers, asked her what possible use the Petition of Rights could be to any person in the twentieth century.

"Silence, Diana." Miss Pilbank rapped sharply on the desk in front of her with her pencil.

Presently Diana spoke to Katherine again. She felt if she didn't she should be forced to give a loud whoop as she, had been silent for nearly an hour.

"Two marks, Diana," said Miss Pilbank,

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"Taken or given?" inquired Diana, hailing any sort of conversation with gladness.

"Taken, of course."

"Thank you. You see I don't understand the system of marks."

"Don't be impertinent," thundered Miss Pilbank.

Now, to do Diana credit, she had had no intention of being impertinent. She was really wishful for information, and Miss Pilbank's sharp reprimand roused her blood.

"I did not mean to be rude, but now that we are on the subject, I may as well tell you, Miss Pilbank, I have no intention of worrying about marks while I am here. I thought it all out in bed last night. They are only imaginary lines like the equator, without any real value. If I bother about them I shall have a dull time."

There was a shocked silence in the room. A silence strained and ominous. Diana glanced at the girls with interest, their eyes were round and prominent, their breathing was laboured. Her eyes travelled to Miss Pilbank, and she was startled at her appearance. What *could* she have said to cause her English governess to become this unhealthy leaden colour? It had seemed harmless enough, and she had really not meant to cause

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poor Miss Pilbank suffering. She must try and explain matters.

"You see," she continued, "I had no marks when I came to school, so you and Miss Bub must have given them to me, and have a perfect right to take them back." She was really anxious to soothe Miss Pilbank.

"Go to your room, and to-morrow bring me two hundred lines from 'Télémaque.'" Miss Pilbank was evidently struggling for composure.

"French or English?" asked Diana with alacrity.

"English, of course — a translation."

"And which part? The bit about Penelope's lovers?" There was an audible titter and Diana smiled at the girls comprehensively. Things were quite looking up.

"Diana Wenderby, leave the room *at once*. I will later send up a passage marked." Miss Pilbank absolutely hissed this at her refractory, maddening pupil; and Diana vanished.

Taking the stairs two at a time, she narrowly escaped a heavy collision with Miss Bub.

"Where are you going?" that lady inquired.

"To my room."

"Why — at this hour?"

"I'm — in disgrace."

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"Already? Your mother would be grieved." And Diana stood still as though suddenly turned to stone. She had forgotten her mother. Miss Bub passed on without another word, and Diana slowly went to the room she shared with three other girls — Katherine Carruthers being one of them — and sat down in front of a north window, which faced a brick wall, to review her position. She felt all sick and sorry inside. The night previous to her leaving home she and her mother had had a long talk. She had sat on a footstool, with her head against Mrs. Wenderby's nice silk knees. She always loved to hear the gentle rustle and movement of her mother's silk gowns, and Rossetti's lines — Diana had devoured poetry when she should have been learning long division sums — were often in her thoughts:

"Our mother rose from where she sat;  
Her needles as she laid them down  
Met lightly, and her silken gown settled:  
No other noise than that."

She had made many promises of good behaviour as her mother's hand caressed her hair, for her heart felt breaking at the thought of leaving her. Diana cared for few people, but when she did she gave them a whole-hearted devotion.

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Her mother stood to her for all that was perfect, and this mother she was leaving in a few hours' time.

"You see you have run wild at home more or less." Mrs. Wenderby paused. She hated to appear "preachy" even to her own children. "Your father and I have believed in few restrictions, trusting to the good sense and natural feelings of decency of you all to keep you straight, but now you will have to face a discipline that will be hard and irksome at first, but you must be sensible and try to realize that discipline of some sort in all communities is necessary. If you were going to be a nurse, for example, or if a man, a soldier or sailor, there would be discipline of the most exacting order. So you must make up your mind to conform to the rules for our sakes as well as your own. We shan't mind — your father and I — if you don't carry off prizes" — she smiled one of her "early-dawn Lucerne" smiles — "but we *do* want you to learn all you can, be as good as you can, and play the game as well as you can. And nothing else matters."

"I *will*," and when Diana spoke in that tone she meant it.

And now the very day after her arrival at school she was sitting in her bedroom disgraced, mutinous



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in heart and sick in mind. And it was such a dull room. Depressedly she stared at four neat dressing gowns hanging against the wall, at four pairs of bedroom slippers beneath four chairs, at the texts strewn about the walls, and thought of her mother at home sitting with a beautiful faith in her.

Something must be done. She would read her Bible and say her prayers and see what happened. See if her heart could be made to feel less hard and wicked. Besides, it would save her performing her devotions at night. She objected strongly to saying her prayers before three strange girls. She opened her Bible and was soon engrossed in the Song of Solomon, which she had not read for some considerable time, Miss Tipson having elected that she should, for her daily Scripture portion during school hours, study the prophets or something equally safe and unexciting.

The Song of Solomon appealed to the poetic side of Diana's temperament, and soon she was absorbed in the beauty of the language: "For lo! the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land." She paused to consider this: "The voice of the turtle is heard in the land."

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What sort of a noise did a turtle make? And did Solomon mean a turtle dove or the creature from which soup was made? She decided, as it has been spoken of in conjunction with singing birds, that he must have meant a dove.

She passed on to the next verse: "The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs," (she knew the satisfaction of this, for was there not a fig-tree at Moss Deeping on the south wall close to the conservatory?) "and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell." She stopped with her finger marking the passage, her eyes on the hideous brick wall, but unseeing. She was away again at Moss Deeping, she had left the dull ugly bedroom. She was wrapped around by the sweet sensuous warmth of the vinery, her nostrils were filled with the faint scent of muscatel grapes — grapes that were so precious that the Wenderby children had only enjoyed their lusciousness when they had been able to rake up an illness of sufficient seriousness as to raise their temperatures and give them an unquenchable thirst. How she had loved those grapes! and the smell of the scented geranium which had lived in pots on stands beneath the vine, and the musks, and primulas and begonias; and, best of all, the pale yellow roses which had clambered up tall

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sticks as though desirous of rubbing shoulders with the pendant bunches of grapes. With an effort, and a sense of overwhelming misery, she returned to Northport and school and Miss Bub and her own drab surroundings. "Arise my love, my fair one, and come away." Diana's pulses quickened; this was getting romantic. "Oh, my dove, thou art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs"—now she was on her feet declaiming the lines aloud—"let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice: for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." The last words were addressed to Miss Pilbank, who entered the room at that particular moment and who quite jumped at such an unexpected greeting.

"What are you doing?" she asked when she had recovered from her surprise.

"Reading the Bible?"

"But why?"

Diana placed an embroidered book-marker in the Song of Solomon. "Do you never read the Bible?" she asked in a sort of sad surprise.

"Of — course," stammered Miss Pilbank.

"Well, so do I," said Diana quietly, and her governess regarded her with wide round eyes.

"The Song of Solomon," continued Diana,

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"is beautiful and poetical, though it's not quite proper."

"How do you know?"

"Because we never read it in school at home. All improper passages in Shakespeare, and the Bible, Miss Tipson, our governess, who was unmarried, made us skip; afterward I read them to myself."

Miss Pilbank closed her eyes as though the sight of Diana offended her vision. "You are a naughty, disagreeable girl," she said, "and — your manners are abominable." The words seemed to be wrung from her, and her pale lips twitched with emotion.

Unexpectedly Diana felt sorry for her. She was always able to put herself in other people's places, and she knew that if she were Miss Pilbank at this moment she should be feeling exactly as she felt; so she tried to explain matters for the satisfaction of both.

"I'm not really quite as horrid as I seem — at least, I don't think I am — but of course one never knows. But I dislike this school intensely. I should dislike any school, and all the rules and restrictions seem to me to have been purposely designed to drive sane girls silly. I lost a mark this morning because I left a hair ribbon on my

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dressings-table. I didn't mind the mark in the very smallest degree — but I did mind being corrected about the hair ribbon. If it had been a boot now I could have understood an objection being raised, for boots are often muddy or dusty, but a clean, neat hair ribbon" — in her earnestness she sat down on a bed and clasped her hands round her knees — "how could it possibly matter?"

Had Miss Pilbank understood anything at all of young girls, of the workings of their minds, of their want of balance, of their unbridled emotions, of their astonishing but delightful young egotism, of their sincere belief that they are the hub of the universe, of their pitiful surprise when they find they are not, of their warm and generous enthusiasms and their utter lack of a sense of proportion, she would have sat down beside Diana and endeavoured to arrive at an understanding between them. A little sympathy now, a little tact, a word of kindness would have achieved what discipline could *never* achieve, and saved Miss Bub much subsequent trouble. But Miss Pilbank, though a sound and good teacher, had no more knowledge of the heart of a child than she had of the anatomy of a wire worm.

She merely refused to argue with Diana as to the relative carelessness of hair ribbons or boots

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being left on dressing-tables, coldly handed her a copy of "Télémaque," and instructed her to bring a translation of the passage marked on the morrow.

"You forfeit your play hour this evening after tea and your half holiday to-morrow," she concluded, without moving a muscle of her face. "Kindly return now to the school room and begin your preparation, and the translation must be done in the play hour," and she sailed out of the room without another word, leaving a sore and angry and bloodthirsty child behind her.

## CHAPTER VI

Ten days later Diana ran away from school, and to such purpose that she never returned to it, Miss Bub's high-class boarding school for young ladies being in consequence under a cloud for some considerable time. A school from which young ladies run away must of necessity gain a bad reputation. Poor Miss Bub!

The inspiration to run away came to Diana when she was washing herself early one Saturday morning — to be exact, when she was soaping her ears. For a moment she stood swaying, stunned at the very thought, at the possibility, at the stupendous possibility of doing such a thing, at the gigantic daring of it!

Then, with the blood surging through her body and tingling from head to foot, she sat down to dry herself. She could not stand. It was impossible. She sat there so long that Katherine Carruthers turned from her own cleaning of teeth to ask if there was anything the matter.

Diana shook her head. "No, only a great

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thought, an overwhelming thought which has left me shaky."

"I have them repeatedly," announced Katherine placidly. "They come to me when I'm on mountains or in beautiful cathedrals and buildings. I am used to them. I — I haven't to sit down to them."

"You are clever, you see" (Katherine was the top girl in the school), "and are used to them. This is the first really great thought I have ever conceived." Her voice rang and vibrated with an indescribable note as she emerged rosy from the rough towel, rang with exaltation. Liberty, wonderful, glorious liberty, danced before her eyes.

"You look a bit demented," said Helen Barton, a practical, steady girl of unattractive appearance, laying down her hair brush and examining Diana with careful scrutiny.

Diana told her not to worry about how she looked, and to get on with her own plait or she would be late for breakfast. She then dived into a drawer. She would put on clean clothes to-day instead of to-morrow — Sunday — and a double set in a case of emergency. She might be away some little time and would of necessity require a change of under-garments — one on and one in the wash.



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To wear a double set of clothing and then fasten one's own frock down the back in the usual way is not easy to accomplish.

"You've grown very fat," said Katherine, who had come to the rescue, struggling with the buttons and buttonholes.

"Yes, all in a minute," returned Diana gravely, "just like a leech. Have you ever seen a quite thin leech fasten on to a person and become fat in less than ten minutes?"

"Don't." Katherine shuddered with disgust.

Diana laughed and took a high leap across the room to the dressing-table. "That's my thought," she explained, and again her young voice vibrated.

The others went down to prayers as the gong sounded. Diana had been late every morning since she came, and Miss Bub was nearly in despair. Marks and punishment lessons equally left the girl unmoved.

Now, she made her preparations for flight hurriedly. She had been invited to have tea that afternoon, being Saturday and a half holiday, with a Miss Greensheaves, an old friend of her father who resided at Northport, in a nice neat little villa on the front. Once during each term Miss Greensheaves had been in the habit of ex-

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tending this hospitality to Victoria and Drusilla, once and once only, Miss Greensheaves's sense of duty being stronger than her natural hospitality. This was Diana's opportunity. Her way to liberty lay through Miss Greensheaves, who, at that very moment, was debating as to what cakes she should have for tea, and whether Diana's appetite was as large as Drusilla's. Miss Greensheaves needn't have worried her poor small brain. Her cakes were never touched. She never made the acquaintance of her old friend's third daughter.

Diana made up a parcel of a few things she was most likely to need: a brush and comb, tooth brush, slippers, handkerchiefs and two night-gowns. She squeezed these into as small a circumference as possible, and then searched about for some string. None was forthcoming. The gong sounded a second time. She was driven to using some white tape from her work basket. Popping the parcel into a drawer, she ran down to breakfast with a light heart. All the morning she was completing her plans for flight. She would go in her old boots because they had the strongest soles and she might be in a muddy country; she had, at present, no idea of her destination. That would come later. The [most important point, at the moment, was to get away

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undiscovered. She felt grateful to Miss Greensheaves. She never once thought of her parents. Yet she loved them.

She was unprepared for Miss Pilbank accompanying her to Miss Greensheaves, and could not suppress her annoyance and disappointment.

"You thought you would be permitted to walk there alone? Through the streets by yourself and so many — m — people about?" Miss Pilbank passed through the gate into the road with a firm and protecting air.

"You didn't mean people," said Diana calmly, "you meant men, and I never take any notice of them. You needn't fear, mother has warned me about them. There were few in Heatherland and all quite respectable; but here mother says it is different. I suppose there are a good many week-enders from Liverpool knocking about with nothing to do, and mother said those were the ones to avoid. There we have just passed one — that man in the brown hat with a blue, clean-shaven face — " In her excitement to make Miss Pilbank understand she almost stood still. She never ceased to horrify and shock that poor lady.

"Go on, Diana," she commanded sternly,

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"and don't talk so loudly, and," spying the girl's parcel, "what have you got there?"

"This is just a parcel, a plain brown paper parcel." Diana spoke with extreme non-chalance, and swung it about on its loop.

"But it is tied with white tape." The governess eyed the parcel with excessive disapproval, it disturbed her conventionality.

"And why shouldn't it be? I ask you that, Miss Pilbank. Tape is strong and clean and white — string is thin and — and rotten —" Rapidly as she talked she was searching about for a way of escape.

They were in the principal street of Northport, which was thronged with people. It would have been much easier and simpler for Diana to run away from Miss Greensheaves. She could go upstairs and wash her hands after tea and then slip out. But that would be tame and unexciting. To escape from under Miss Pilbank's very nose would be adventurous.

"Look" — she paused in front of a milliner's window — "at that toque — the blue one, Miss Pilbank. It would just suit you. No, the one at the very top of the window, trimmed with geraniums — isn't it a dream?"

And like a poor foolish fly Miss Pilbank ad-

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justed her glasses in front of her short-sighted eyes and walked straight into the trap — whilst Diana slipped quietly from her side, shot down a side street, and ran for dear life to the station at which she had arrived not a fortnight back.

Her bump of locality was good. It had always astonished Tommie. Now she needed to ask for no directions: she simply made a beeline for the station, running swiftly and unerringly and without exertion. She was in good condition, her muscles hard and springy. But luck failed at the last turning: the tape slipped from the parcel, which had been loosely tied, and the whole of its contents were scattered into the road.

A nightgown and a toothbrush in the privacy of one's own bedroom are familiar, homely, pleasant objects; but lying in the gutter in the broad light of day, and reviewed by scores of passers-by, become absolutely immodest.

In the first moment Diana decided to abandon them. She had no fear of Miss Pilbank, who even had she been able to track her pupil's flight, must be far behind, but she *did* fear her own nightgown and toothbrush. They looked so — so indecent lying there. But she was not permitted thus weakly to cast them off. They were known to be

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hers. Already officious helpers were pressing them into her unwilling arms, and every man and woman's face wore the look of: "This is your toothbrush and your nightgown and your brush and comb, no good pretending they're not."

"Th — ank you," said Diana, feebly, as a young hook-nosed man presented her with her stockings, "and I'm afraid I can't hold any more. Would you be kind enough to rescue me the paper? If I stoop I shall drop everything again." Her second nightgown, which was trimmed with plain crochet work, was hanging from her arm in its entire white length.

The young man did as he was requested and offered to help her make up the parcel again. He held out the paper while Diana stuffed in the things. She regarded the broken tape ruefully.

"I have some string," he said brightly; "it is unwise to use tape, it is bound to go."

"I had nothing else."

"String is cheap," he said firmly.

"However cheap it may be, it cannot be procured if one is a prisoner," said Diana dramatically. "Good day, and thank you very much." For two peas, she felt this firm young man would follow her, anxious to protect law and order, and hand her over to the police. So putting her best

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foot forward she ran like a hare till she reached the station and main booking office.

Pantingly she demanded a ticket to Liverpool. From there she could get to some distant and safe place without fear of being traced. From here it would be dangerous. Miss Bub would scent her out. Miss Bub would raise the hue and cry at every station in Northport. And still Diana never thought of her parents.

"How soon is there a train?" she inquired of a porter, as she stood waiting on the departure platform for Liverpool.

"Half an hour, miss."

"Half an hour!" She was dismayed. Half an hour would give Miss Bub sufficient time to set inquiries on foot in every direction. She dared not risk it. She must disappear now, *at once*, somewhere.

"How soon will there be a train to — anywhere?"

The porter raised his cap and scratched his head. "That depends on where you want to go."

"Of course it does, but — it doesn't matter."

He looked at her.

"I mean I don't want to go anywhere in particular."

His face dropped. He was not versed in feminine complexities.

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"What I mean is," she cried wildly, "I want to go somewhere at once out of this station. I don't care where it is so long as it is fifty miles away."

"Change of air, I suppose," he said impudently.

Diana caught sight of a train getting up steam on a distant platform. "Where's that going to?" she shrieked, and, without waiting for a reply, she flew along the platform, up some stairs, over a bridge, down some more stairs and shot into the guard's van of the train just as it moved out of the station, and — passed Miss Pilbank on the way. Passed Miss Pilbank standing with horrified eyes, and mouth the shape of a lemon, and face of ashen hue. And Diana, with presence of mind, for which she commended herself to the end of her days, leant out of the window and waved to Miss Pilbank a parting farewell with a somewhat grimy handkerchief.

She liked to be polite when she conscientiously could.



## CHAPTER VII

"I beg your pardon," she said to the guard; "I hope I didn't tread on your toes. I am a little excited, as you will observe, as I nearly missed the train. I will change into a carriage at the first stop, as I expect I am inconveniencing you."

"The first stop is Manchester," he said gloomily, straightening his hat, which she had jerked to one side in colliding with him.

"Manchester?" Diana echoed.

He refused to repeat his statement.

"I—I have always wanted to see Manchester," she said pleasantly, seating herself on a box.

Manchester, after all, would do as well as anywhere else.

"Well, you'll go there to-day."

"But my ticket is to Liverpool," she suddenly remembered. Her funds were low. She felt disinclined to pay for two tickets.

"Change at Manchester," he said imperturba-

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bly. "A bit long way round, that's all, and not quite so cheap."

"Of course I could go somewhere else," said Diana, disregarding his last observation. But the guard displayed no interest in her prospective movements.

"I mean there are lots of other places besides Liverpool."

"Lots," he agreed.

"Could you suggest a nice place about a hundred miles from Manchester and not costing more than ten shillings to get there?"

"Particular to climate?"

Diana saw that the man was inclined to be as impertinent as the porter at Northport had been, so she desisted from further conversation for the present. She stared through the window at the flying country, lost in thought. And it seems strange that with all her passionate love for her parents, her mind never once travelled to them, never conceived the misery she would be causing them in a few hours' time, never realized that even now a telegram from Miss Bub had been received at Moss Deeping and that the same dear parents were stricken with anxiety and grief. It was always characteristic of Diana — and she was not unduly selfish as young people go — that

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what she wanted to do she did without thought or consideration for that which lay in her path, and which might possibly interfere with other desires. She just walked over it. She didn't hurt it if she could help it, but she walked over it. She walked over her parents now; and later, when this was pointed out to her, she was filled with a deep remorse. Indeed, she felt she could never make amends to them throughout her life. "Some day I will make it up to you," she cried; "I don't know how, but I *will*." And a way was found for her.

"Have you a railway guide?" she presently asked the guard. She felt it was important to decide where she should eventually go before reaching Manchester.

He handed her one—a Northwestern—and slowly she ran her finger down the index: "Carlisle." Her heart beat a trifle quickly. Near Carlisle was a place called Wensilloth, and at Wensilloth was a beautiful farm which boarded and lodged you for one pound a week. She had heard of it from Miss Tipson, who once, long ago, had stayed there, and had often spoken of it. In fact this farm had become quite a joke with the Wenderby children. Miss Tipson, when cream was placed on the table, could never re-

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frain from referring to the thickness of the cream at Hazelbank Farm, or the deliciousness of its butter. It might have been the only farm in existence. Diana used to kick Drusilla under the table when the subject of cream came up, and "draw" Miss Tipson in the most shameless manner. Now she felt grateful to her. She, Diana, would go to Hazelbank Farm and sample its produce for herself. She would spend a restful week in the country and there make her plans for the future.

So deep was she in thought that she scarcely noticed they were approaching Manchester.

"Can you tell me how the trains run to Carlisle? I can't make the guide out," she inquired of the guard as the train began to slacken speed.

"On the lines," he returned with a grin.

On looking back to this period, Diana used to wonder if there was anything in her appearance that invited instant rudeness from strangers. And, at the time, it quite depressed her. She tried to be polite herself, tried her best. Perhaps she didn't realize her "best" was not a very successful one — and that not altogether through her own fault. She was such a curious mixture of childishness and grown-upness: her long black legs, short skirts, two pigtails, and childish,

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petulant mouth didn't "fit" with her independent air and inscrutable eyes. People didn't know what to make of her, so snubbed her, and always to their own cost.

"If I reported you to your superior, I expect you'd be discharged; but seeing that I may have inconvenienced you by my presence, I will take no steps," she said magnificently.

"If I were to report your having been here, you'd get locked up," he retorted succinctly. And, as Diana actually believed him, she sat shivering on the trunk till the train drew up with a jerk at Manchester.

Then jumping out hurriedly, and again stumbling over the long-suffering guard, she scurried to a booking office and asked for a third-class ticket to Carlisle, and, as luck would have it, it was the right booking office.

"There's a train going out in five minutes," said the clerk in a friendly manner. He was a nice clerk and, for some reason, touched by the small, white, eager face.

Diana thanked him while she counted her change, which, to her dismay, proved to be one and sevenpence. The ticket had practically absorbed the whole of her money. And she was hungry. She had had no tea.

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But her financial position in no way deterred her from embarking upon her journey. The spirit of adventure had entered into her, the bit was between her teeth. She had been in prison for ten long days. Now she was free. She was ready to conquer worlds. She almost gambolled down the station, her plaits flying, her eyes glowing. She was like a colt in a wide field. An old tired man turned to look at her. "If youth but knew," he whispered to himself gently, "if youth but knew how glorious it is to be young." Then he adjusted his silk muffler and passed on, while Diana made her way to the nearest refreshment room. For the sum of twopence she purchased the largest bath bun she could find on the counter, and with another twopence a ham sandwich — not so large as she could have wished from her inward sensations, but she must husband her funds. At the bookstall she invested a halfpenny in "Scraps" — she liked travelling in comfort. Then she found the Carlisle train, and took her place, with one minute to spare. She had four fellow travellers: a lady of bountiful proportions and asthmatical breathing, two girls — probably her daughters — and a clergyman, with a thin, kindly face who was reading the "Guardian." Diana's seat, a corner one, was opposite to his.

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She longed to start at once on her refreshments, but waited till the train moved. To eat in a stationary train seemed, to her, an incorrect thing to do. She was not an experienced traveller, but she felt this to be an unwritten law.

There was a banging of doors, a shrill whistle, and the train glided slowly out of the gloomy station. They were off. Diana's new life had begun. She thought, almost pleasurable now, of Miss Bub and Miss Pilbank. She pictured their fruitless search for her, their anger. Miss Pilbank's rage at being hoodwinked about the blue toque which would be so becoming to her; and laughter suddenly seized her. It took her badly owing to her manful efforts to check it, and because the capacious lady stared at her fixedly and disapprovingly. It was bad form to scream in railway carriages about nothing, the lady's manner seemed to indicate. Her daughters were controlled, well-behaved young ladies, she was thankful to say. While as for Diana — the lady turned her back on her and studied a passing chimney. But the clergyman smiled in sympathy. He liked young people to be jolly, and Diana's heart warmed to him.

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"You are amused at something?" he leant toward her, inviting conversation.

"Yes," said Diana, "life — is funny."

"Not always," he said, with a little sigh.

"No, perhaps not," she agreed; "it wasn't with me till two o'clock this afternoon ——" She paused. She mustn't say too much, she must be guarded.

"What time does this train get to Carlisle? Do you know?" she asked.

"At half-past seven."

"Oh — thank you." She would be late in getting on to Wensilloth and Hazelbank Farm unless there were a good connection. She drew the ham sandwich from its paper bag, and hoped the small sum of money left to her would be sufficient to pay the fare on to Wensilloth. She knew it was not many stations away. She did not propose at this moment to consider how she was to pay for her board and lodging at the farm. She was optimistic. A way would turn up. Perhaps Mr. Snow, the owner of the farm in Miss Tipson's time, would take her on as a help. She had not done much housework, but she was willing and strong, and she would take low wages. She might, too, work on the farm; she loved outdoor life, and understood the correct



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feeding of fowls and ducks and pigs, and she could soon pick up milking. Diana's imagination ran away with her—she had even attended a "Harvest Home"—it was September, and there would, of course, be a Harvest Home—before she had finished her bath bun.

Unknown to her, the clergyman had been watching her vivid face with its play of emotions, while she ate. She turned and surprised his gaze. He looked inclined to be conversational.

"Can you tell me?" she asked, wiping away the crumbs from her knee with her handkerchief, "what time there will be a train on to Wensilloth?"

"There won't be any. The last leaves at seven o'clock," he replied pleasantly.

"Oh!" said Diana.

He saw the blank look of dismay on her face, and inquired if friends were not meeting her at Carlisle.

She shook her head.

"They will be meeting you at Wensilloth, perhaps? Expecting you will have caught the last train?"

Again she shook her head. "Nobody

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was meeting me. I was taking them by surprise."

"What will you do then?"

"I don't know," she replied drearily.

"You will go to a hotel?" he suggested.

"I can't. I have no money. I shall sit all night in the ladies' first-class waiting room."

"But you are so young," he remonstrated, "you can't do that. Surely your parents or friends must have known you couldn't catch the connection to Wensilloth." He looked quite distressed.

Diana did not speak.

"I have a daughter of about your age," he volunteered next.

"I hope she is a comfort to you," said Diana, piously. She could think of nothing else suitable to say.

"Very much, thank you." His voice was amused. Then he fidgeted about and stared through the window, and glanced at Diana, and studied the floor. Finally he leant across to her and whispered: "Look here, I don't want to offend you, and I can see you are quite able to take care of yourself ——" Diana's heart warmed toward him. This nice clergyman was not like Tommie, he appreciated

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her self-reliance and ability to manage her own affairs.

"Yes," she said cordially.

"But — I can't bear to think of your sitting up all night in that chilly waiting room. So will you accept a loan of ten shillings or a pound from me? And here is my address, so that you will be able to return it. I know of a very nice, quiet, temperance hotel in Carlisle, run by a Mrs. MacDougal, a kind-hearted Scotch woman, who would make you very comfortable if you would go to her for the night. She is in Duncan Street, close to the station."

"Thank you very much," said Diana gratefully; "it is most kind of you, and I am very glad to accept your help. I will return the money as soon as ever I get to Wensilloth." How she proposed doing this she did not pause to consider. Possibly she hoped for a month's wages in advance from Mr. Snow for her help.

"Here is my card," he continued, and again Diana's heart melted toward him. To be presented with a card betokened absolute grown-upness on the part of the recipient. Not that she really wanted to be grown-up, but she did want to be independent.

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"I haven't one of mine with me; at least," she added more honestly, "I haven't one at all. My sisters' names were tacked on to my mother's when they left school, and I suppose mine will join them: 'Mrs. and the Misses Wenderby.'"

"And when are you to leave school?"

"I have left," she replied, while a note of defiance crept into her voice.

"Oh," he observed, "indeed."

And Diana thought it wiser to change the conversation, and finally lapsed into silence. She was tired after all the excitement, and dozed a little in her corner. The clergyman sat and studied her. She interested him. She was so young, and alive, and fresh, and her grown-up airs were delicious. And she apparently felt everything so keenly, and he had noticed that nothing escaped her alert observation. Even when they had been deep in conversation a smile had flickered across her face when the capacious lady in stooping to recover her glasses had bumped into one of her daughters who had also stooped. Her face had glowed, too, at catching a glimpse of the sunset reflected in a calm pool embowered in autumn-tinted trees. Just a flash of the pool as the train tore along and a corresponding flash

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in the girl's speaking face. He sighed, he knew not why. And yet he did. He had studied human nature. Any woman with such a face as the sleeping one opposite to him would possess an enormous capacity for suffering and joy — and suffering would possibly predominate, for is not this life a vale of tears? He hoped that things would be well with her. The clergyman was a really religious man, with an unbounded love for his fellow creatures. He silently breathed a little prayer for Diana.

Presently he woke her. "We are nearing Carlisle," he said, peering into the gathering darkness. "I will look after your luggage for you, and I think if you have no objection I will take you to Mrs. MacDougal's. It is late for you to be out alone."

"Indeed, no," she protested quickly, "though it is very kind of you. But I am quite accustomed to being out alone. Besides, it is not really late, and if you will tell me Mrs. MacDougal's number, I shall easily find her."

"And your luggage?"

"I — I have none," and her embarrassment was so apparent that he did not press the point.

He helped her out of the carriage and slipped the sovereign into her hand. "Tell Mrs. Mac-

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Dougal to take great care of you, and mention my name, and I hope you will be comfortable."

"You *do* believe I am going to return you this money?" asked Diana earnestly.

"I believe it as surely as the sun will rise to-morrow, little lady," and, raising his hat, he stepped into a carriage that was awaiting him and drove away.

"The first really good clergyman I've met," thought Diana with youthful dogmatism. She had only known one.

## CHAPTER VIII

A few minutes later, with her parcel beneath her arm, Diana walked into Mrs. MacDougal's temperance hotel and demanded a bedroom and sitting-room for the night, whilst carelessly mentioning that the Rev. John Phillimore had highly recommended Mrs. MacDougal's establishment to her.

Mrs. MacDougal, with one shrewd, yet kindly, glance, rapidly appraised the girl before her, with her short skirts, dishevelled hair, and small amount of luggage; and found that she was "respectable."

"A bedroom you can certainly have, but a sitting-room is expensive," (Mrs. MacDougal spoke in broad Scotch, difficult of transcription) "but if you object to having your meals in the public dining-room, what do you say to joining me and my daughter Pollie in our private sitting-room?"

Diana, always of a sociable disposition, abandoned her own sitting-room without a pang. Why she should have demanded one at all with

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only a sovereign between her and starvation, her family, subsequently, was never able to understand.

"I shall be delighted," she said in her most gracious manner, "and I should like some tea and toast and two boiled eggs, please, as soon as possible."

Her hostess assured her they should be ready by the time she had had a wash, and, leading the way upstairs to an old-fashioned, comfortably furnished bedroom, she rang for a chambermaid to bring hot water and towels, and bustled away.

"Now, this is life," soliloquized Diana, whilst reading the texts, and studying an old sampler on the wall. A Mary Hannah Linnet had worked the last, at the age of sixteen, in the year 1759.

"Mary Hannah was my age," said Diana aloud. "She worked samplers, poor thing, and I see life."

She undid her parcel and arranged her few things to the best advantage, trying to make them look more than they were. She felt glad she had brought a nightdress case. A nightdress case had a permanent look about it, and was in no way associated with hurried flight.

She descended the stairs, after a good wash,



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in excellent spirits. There were tea and toast and boiled eggs ahead. She was fond of boiled eggs, one elated her, two caused positive exhilaration. The girls at Miss Bub's would be now going to bed, and *she* was about to sup off boiled eggs.

She entered Mrs. MacDougal's sitting-room with a smiling face. A cheery fire was burning in the grate, and the table was laid.

This was Diana's first acquaintance with people who were Scotch; with all the fine qualities of the nicest of the Scotch and with, at the same time, the national characteristic very strongly developed. The MacDougals were curious. Diana was more nearly driven to lying during the half hour that followed than she had been since her religious mania.

They waited till she had consumed her first egg and two pieces of toast, then they began:

"Was she an old friend of Mr. Phillimore?"

"No."

"How long had she known him?"

"Not very long."

"Was she acquainted with Mrs. Phillimore and the daughter?"

"No."

"Perhaps she had known him before he was married?"

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This was so obviously impossible that they hurried on to another subject: "Did she know Carlisle well?"

"No."

"Had she been here before?"

"No."

"Was she going to make a long stay?"

"No."

"Perhaps the night only?"

"Yes."

"Where, then, was she going to?"

"She was going on to Wensilloth in the morning."

"But there was no train."

"No train!" Diana stared at them in consternation. They shook their heads. "Wensilloth is but a wee place. There are no trains on Sunday, nothing till Monday."

She gazed at them blankly. What should she do? She must remain here till Monday. She could not go to Hazelbank Farm with its peace and cream and fresh butter till Monday. She laid down her egg-spoon. Had she been of an uncontrolled disposition she would have burst into tears, so great was her disappointment.

The MacDougals looked at her sympathetically.

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"Are your friends expecting you to-morrow?" they asked.

"What friends?" said Diana, taken un-awares.

Mrs. MacDougal glanced at her daughter.

"The friends you are going to visit?"

Diana became lost in thought.

"Are they?" persisted her hostess.

Diana shook her head.

"Perhaps you're not going to friends?"

Diana sort of half shook and half nodded her head, so that any interpretation might be put upon it; but Mrs. MacDougal was not thus to be taken in.

"Perhaps you're going to school then?"

"Going to school!" shouted Diana, springing to her feet, "God forbid!" Then at Mrs. MacDougal's amazed face she sat down again heavily. "I — I've left school," she stammered.

"You look young for that," pronounced Mrs. MacDougal.

"Perhaps I'm older than I look," hedged Diana. "Girls, women, rarely look their right ages. Now you" — she was anxious to pay Mrs. MacDougal a compliment — "I don't suppose you're more than fifty-five," she smiled pleasantly.

"I'm forty-three," and at the freezing note in

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Mrs. MacDougal's up to now pleasant voice Diana shivered.

"I'm sorry," she said, trying to think of something soothing to add, but no inspiration came. She was not resourceful in the way of small pleasantries which help so many women through life. Drusilla would have put things straight in a couple of shakes.

"These are very nice eggs," she remarked pleasantly; "you're own laying, I suppose?"

And now Mrs. MacDougal rose from her chair. Humour was not her strong point. She said: "Your remark was intended to be funny, I expect, but I fail to see it." She prepared to leave the room, but Pollie interposed: "I don't think the young lady meant it. Don't be cross, mother. You were alluding to the fowls, weren't you?" she looked at Diana.

"Of course, I was," returned Diana heartily, "what else could I have meant? I am sorry if I have offended you." Diana really liked Mrs. MacDougal, and she had the awful feeling that she might be turned out of the warm, cosy room into the dark streets at any moment.

Mrs. MacDougal's crossness vanished as quickly as it had come. "That's all right," she said warmly. "Now what would you like

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to do to-night? It's only half-past eight. Pollie and I are going to see the tight-rope walker, Roberts. He's to begin his show at nine o'clock. Would you care to come with us? Or, perhaps, you are tired and would rather go to bed?"

"Indeed, no," said Diana, "I should love to go. It's much too early for bed." She pictured Katherine and the other girls already in their rooms, neatly folding up their hair ribbons, placing their slippers side by side beneath their respective chairs, and their stockings over the backs. And she was going to see a tight-rope walker. This was life indeed.

The entertainment thrilled her from head to foot with delicious sensations. She gripped Pollie's arm at the most critical moments when she felt it was inevitable that Roberts *must* perform a somersault.

And she slept dreamlessly that night without a care or thought for the morrow; even when she knelt beside her bed and said her prayers, murmuring sleepily, "Pray God, bless father and mother," her imagination conjured up no worn, anxious faces, whose gray hairs by her conduct were, so to speak, being brought with sorrow to the grave. If she visioned them at all, it was with smiling, interested faces, listening

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with sympathy to the story of her adventures, which, subsequently, she had every intention of relating to them. Diana, by nature, was not secretive, and she liked taking the floor on occasions.

And she enjoyed her Sunday, too, in Carlisle. Once she found she could not get on to Wensilloth, she cheerfully made the best of things. With Pollie she attended morning service at the Cathedral, joining in the hymns with great heartiness and enjoying the sense of space—for she was unfamiliar with cathedrals—and the beauty of the stained-glass windows.

In the afternoon she went for a walk through some fields—again with Pollie—and that walk was her undoing. She liked Pollie so much, she had such faith in her; she thought her just a nice, simple, homely Scotch girl without guile or deceit, and she became unguarded in speech. She drew Pollie's kind arm through her own as they walked along a little field path, and gently pressed it. "Isn't it lovely to be free?" she cried, giving a sudden little skip.

"How do you mean?" inquired Pollie, and without skipping with her.

At once Diana saw the slip she had made.

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"O — er, free of people," she replied evasively; "it's so nice and quiet here."

"I like people," said Pollie, without appearing to notice her companion's evasiveness, "don't you?"

"Not many. I think there are few nice ones. I once had a great friend named Tommie. We did everything together, and now — he is gone," her voice became plaintive.

"Gone where?"

"Gone out of my life. He is grown up now, and has become handsome and polite, and tries to take care of me. He means well, but I have no use for him. He even wants to carry things for me ——" Her voice was full of scorn.

"I think he sounds rather nice," said Pollie tentatively.

"Yes, you would. You are just that sort," responded Diana calmly.

They fell into silence on the homeward journey. Diana was busy with her plans for the morrow. She composed a speech in readiness for her arrival at Mr. Snow's. She imagined him a jolly, red-faced, honest, kindly farmer. This is how her speech began: "Good-day, Mr. Snow. My name is Diana Wenderby, and my home is at Heatherland in Cheshire. I have frequently

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heard of you from Miss Tipson, our late governess, who once spent a very pleasant time with you, and who always spoke with admiration of the excellence of your cream and butter. I am in need of a situation, and, knowing the difficulty of the servant question in these days, it struck me that you might be glad to engage me as a help. Not a lady-help, because I once heard Mrs. Oldfield, our rector's wife, say that a lady-help stood for all that spelt incapacity. I mean a help who can really do things. I once beat the seats of our drawing-room chairs during a Spring cleaning when the charwoman failed. Well, there was not much of those seats left by the time I had ——" She paused. There was something wrong here. "What are you thinking about?" interrupted Pollie, and without meaning to be curious.

"I was thinking of Spring cleanings and dusty chairs," replied Diana promptly.

"What a strange thought," mused Pollie.

"Yes," said Diana. They were in Duncan Street now. "I have so enjoyed my walk," she added, as she went into the hotel.

"So have I," said Pollie, "and, by the way, where is your luggage?"

"My luggage?" Diana was still off her guard,



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but recovered herself quickly. "My luggage is in safe hands; it will be sent after me."

"But luggage is usually sent in advance."

"Not mine," said Diana stiffly, as she preceded Pollie up the stairs, "at least not on this occasion."

## CHAPTER IX

The following morning Diana was up betimes with her parcel packed before going down to breakfast, her intention being to make an early start for Wensilloth.

But Pollie arranged otherwise. It seemed a pity, she said, for Diana to leave Carlisle till she had seen one or two of its more interesting features. To begin with, there was a famous biscuit factory. An hour or two, she thought, could make no difference to Diana; there was a train to Wensilloth at 2.30. She could have her lunch comfortably before going, and — a biscuit factory was one of the most interesting sights in the world.

Diana liked seeing over things and said that she would stay, and thanked Pollie for her kindness in wishing to entertain her.

Miss MacDougal, for some reason, blushed and turned away quickly.

"She has a modest disposition," thought

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Diana, "and is the sweetest girl! I should like her always to be my friend."

They sallied forth at half-past ten. The biscuit factory was an imposing building, and the sub-manager, known to Pollie, who took them over, was an instructive young man. Young men who are instructive are generally bores. Diana entered into the spirit of biscuit making with her usual interest, but after a time the young man made her yawn.

"I should like to see something else now," she whispered to Pollie.

"There is a museum."

"Is there anything in it?"

"Well, there usually is, or, if you come to think of it, it wouldn't be a museum."

"I think I would rather see the shops," said Diana. "I'm tired of instructive things."

They shop-gazed for an hour. They then returned to the hotel.

Mrs. MacDougal met them at the door. "There is a telegram come for somebody here and none of the visitors will claim it. 'Wenderby' is the name on the envelope."

"Why, it is mine," cried Diana eagerly. She had forgotten that on her arrival at Mrs. MacDougal's she had given her name as "Car-

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michael," which was her second baptismal name. Mrs. MacDougal handed her the telegram, and she and Pollie quietly watched Diana's face as she tore it open.

This is what she read: "Return by one o'clock train, Lime Street, Liverpool, to your distracted parents."

The paper fluttered from her fingers to the floor, and she stared at Mrs. MacDougal and Pollie with wide, vacant eyes. She did not see them. In one blinding flash the realization came to her of the anxiety and horror she must have caused her parents—the misery, the strain, the sickening anxiety. In one flash she saw their gray hairs and tears of sorrow. And she had said that she loved them! She was filled with bitter shame and remorse.

"I must leave at once for Liverpool," she said mechanically, and with dry lips. "My name isn't Carmichael—at least not my surname—it is Wenderby. I ran away from school and my parents have sent for me to return home. I don't know how they have discovered that I am here, perhaps through Mr. Phillimore, the clergyman. They say there is a train at one o'clock, I must hurry and catch that." She paused, and a wave of colour flooded her pale

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cheeks. "I have no money for my ticket. I have just enough to pay you for my board, I think. Will you lend me something, just enough to get me to Liverpool? And I will leave this locket and chain with you — they *are* gold. Father will pay you back. Can you trust me?"

And Mrs. MacDougal's reply was to fall on Diana's neck, with her eyes full of tears, press some money into one hand and a parcel of sandwiches into the other; tell her that a cab was already waiting at the door, and that Pollie would see her off, and that she hoped Diana would never forget them.

"It's all very sudden," said Diana, a little breathlessly, as they drove away; "you — might have been prepared."

"We were," said Pollie. "We sent a wire to your parents at eight o'clock this morning. We felt so sorry for them."

Diana stared at her speechless.

"And that was why you took me to the biscuit factory?"

"Yes," said Pollie, "we were not sure we'd got the right address."

Diana felt unable to ask questions.

"You see we put two and two together. To

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begin with, we knew your name was not Carmichael. We saw an embroidered "W" on your handkerchief, and to make quite sure — we didn't like doing it — we crept into your room when you were asleep and examined your under-clothing."

"O — h!" Diana felt she had been so clever, and she had been hoodwinked on every side. She covered her face with her hands. It was insupportable.

"Do you always lie on your back with your mouth open?" asked Pollie, with interest.

Diana removed her hands quickly. She was very indignant. "Has that anything to do with your story?"

"Perhaps not, but I just wondered."

"Please go on," commanded Diana.

"Then in conversation you happened to say something about Birkenhead, and later on the name of your house, Moss Deeping, slipped out. Then you became so excited when mother asked if you were going to school. And you had no luggage, and are so young, and young ladies in your class don't travel about alone ——"

Little by little Pollie piled up her evidence. "So finally we addressed the telegram to 'Wender-

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by, Moss Deeping, near Birkenhead,' and trusted to luck."

"I don't want to hear any more," said Diana, in a muffled voice.

"But will you tell me why you ran away from school?"

"Because it was a c — confounded hole."

Pollie quite jumped.

"You shouldn't talk like that. It's wicked, and you'll grow up ignorant. I have only just left school and I'm eighteen. Mother believes in education — most Scotch people do."

"And they are mostly dull," said Diana, generalizing. "Of course I don't mean you or your mother! — and how do you know I am ignorant?" They were nearing the station, there was not much time to spare, but Diana felt it was important to know.

"Wait till we've found you a nice seat," said Pollie, jumping out, "and your ticket. Then I'll tell you — perhaps."

"Now," said Diana, when she was comfortably installed in a corner, "go on, I shan't mind. Miss Bub said I was the most ignorant girl she had ever had in her school."

Pollie looked uncomfortable. "You didn't know when Sedan was fought, or where Jamaica

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was. You have made me tell you." She was evidently troubled at her indictment.

But Diana remained serene.

"Sedan always slips," she said, "and is not really important. I know a few things, though you mightn't think it. I can read French pretty correctly, and I know all the Gods and Goddesses in Heathen Mythology — they always interested me; and I like Greek and Egyptian history — especially the latter. I see a reference to Amen Ra — I know all about him. Do you?"

Pollie shook her head.

"Yet you know where Jamaica is. Have you ever read 'Endymion' or 'Pippa Passes' or 'Paradise Lost'?"

Again Pollie shook her head.

The train began to move.

"And yet you know where Jamaica is." Diana's voice was surprised. "I know all that is necessary to know about Jamaica"—the train moved more quickly—"I know that Jamaica produces sugar, rum, tobacco, and earthquakes!" she shouted. "And good-bye, Pollie, dear; I shall never forget you, and you must come and stay with us. Good-bye."

They waved and kissed hands till each was lost to view.



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When the train drew up at Lime Street Station, a few hours later, Diana expected to see just her father and mother; and she was full of tenderness, and regrets, and remorse.

But the whole family met her. Also the family of Oldfield; her father's sister — Aunt Ponsonby, her cousin William Ponsonby, who lived with his mother in Liverpool, and — Tommie.

And for some strange reason Aunt Ponsonby's face was swollen with crying. Why, Diana was unable to comprehend, for she was aware that she was the least favourite niece of her aunt. When Victoria and Drusilla's birthdays came round Aunt Ponsonby sent them a sovereign with many expressions of felicitation and congratulation. To Diana she sent half a crown with most modest congratulations. So why she should now sob, Diana failed to see, unless the mere fact of their relationship overwhelmed her — a relationship, too, that was a close blood one. Mrs. Ponsonby couldn't get out of being Diana's own father's sister, however she tried; therefore she was Diana's own real aunt. Perhaps she felt she had cause for weeping.

She and her son William headed the waiting group, which Diana felt to be very officious of them. Her mother and father should have been

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the first to receive their prodigal daughter. As it was, Aunt Ponsonby cried — “You naughty, naughty girl,” and William dug her facetiously in the ribs.

“How dare you do that?” she cried, her cheeks flaming with anger. “If you ever do it again, I — I shall kick you.”

“*Diana!*” and at the note of pain in her mother’s voice, for it was Mrs. Wenderby who spoke, her passion fell from her like a cloak. Pushing the Ponsonbys to one side, she took her mother into her arms, for she was now much taller than Mrs. Wenderby, and covering her face with kisses murmured brokenly, “Mother, can you ever forgive me?” For a moment they stood; then gently disengaging herself, Mrs. Wenderby said, “We will talk later; now will you shake hands with your friends?”

Diana turned and confronted them. “Quite a family party,” she said nervously. She knew that her parents had brought them here to shame her. She could have wished that they had thought of some other way, for she hated crowds at any time, but there was no resentment in her heart. She realized now what she had done — her selfishness, her thoughtlessness, her cruelty to her dear parents; those parents must punish her

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as they thought best. She faced the position with her customary, practical, dispassionate open-mindedness. And she carried off the situation to the best of her ability.

"I am hungry," she observed when she had kissed her father and sisters and shaken hands solemnly with each of the others, leaving Tommie to the last. Whatever any and every body else might think of her, she knew that Tommie would never fail her. "Buck up," was all he had said in a low, kind voice; but it gave her heart. And from that moment they resumed their old relationship.

"And you've no right to be hungry," pronounced Aunt Ponsonby. "If you were my daughter, I'd keep you on bread and water for a week. Henry, you're just ruining your children. You're so lenient. If they were mine —"

The Wenderby girls blanched at the mere dreadful thought, and Mr. Wenderby, looking greatly distressed, held up his hand for her to cease.

"No, I won't hush. You have always spoilt Diana. She will go to the bad. I'm sure of it. I'm always right." Mrs. Wenderby took out a clean handkerchief and blew her nose with alarming energy.

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"Yes," chimed in Diana, "I expect you're right. I was told by a phrenologist that I'd criminal bumps — " She looked at Aunt Ponsonby defiantly. "He inquired about my family and ancestors. I suppose," she went on musingly, "I am a Wenderby, and some think very like you."

"Heaven forbid!" cried that poor lady, and Tommie grinned behind his hand.

"Be quiet, Diana." Mr. Wenderby's voice was stern. "And if you're hungry, we'd better go to a café for some tea. We've blocked the station long enough."

They all trooped after him in silence. Diana hoped the Ponsonbys would go back to tea in their own house in Falkner Square, but they didn't. They stuck to the party like leeches. Who else should stick if not they who were blood relations?

Diana never forgot that tea-party. Never afterward did she pass the Yashmak Café in Bold Street without shudderings of disgust.

Two tables were placed side by side so that the whole party could sit together, and each person surreptitiously stared at Diana. There was little conversation. No laughter, no gaiety. The tea even was plain and uninviting. No cream buns or chocolate éclairs struck a note of cheerfulness.

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Mr. Wenderby ordered without consultation, rolls and butter for each of his guests, and Indian tea, without cream. The fatted calf was not to be killed on this occasion. Diana's fare was to be of husks and dry lentils.

Mr. and Mrs. Wenderby could have conceived no better plan of punishment for their erring daughter.

The funereal libation over, the Ponsonbys said an unwilling farewell and the remainder of the party took a tram down to the Pier Head and crossed the Mersey by boat. There was still no talk, no laughter. Each person's face was as long as a fiddle.

"Have I really been as wicked as all that?" whispered Diana to Tommie, as they stepped off the boat and walked up the landing stage.

"Quite," said Tommie, suppressing a twinkle.

"Why are *you* here? I thought you were at Oxford — no thank you, I can carry my own parcel." (He was at it again.)

"Your father wrote to tell me of your flight. He thought you might possibly have taken refuge with me." Tommie blushed a little.

"Dear me, how strange. I never thought of such a thing. And you came down to look for me?"

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"Yes, been dragging ponds, and all sorts of things. Diana — I don't want to preach — but you shouldn't have done it, you know. It's nearly killed your parents."

"I know." For a moment her face twitched. "I never thought. Sackcloth and ashes will be my portion for the remainder of my life." She smiled pitifully. "Tommie, what can I do to make up? Are they sending me back to school?"

"No."

"Really!" Diana's voice reminded Tommie of a chaffinch in spring.

"But you ought to want to return if you are really sorry," he felt bound to say.

"Tommie, don't be moral, it doesn't suit you," she laughed.

In Birkenhead the Wenderbys' and Oldfields' carriages were awaiting them. There was no railway line to Heatherland. Tommie had ridden.

As they drove through the autumn-scented lanes Diana's heart was singing a *Te Deum*, though her eyes and mouth were quiet and penitent, as was expected of her. She was not to return to school! She was not to return to school! For one unguarded instant her mutinous mouth gave her away — she smiled. Victoria surprised it, and drew down her own lips. This

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was insupportable. For forty-eight hours Diana had, by her conduct, flung her family into the depths of despair. Victoria, fearing the worst, had been so touched, and so moved to remorse for the little things she had left undone in her relationship with her young sister, that, her customary placidity being broken down, she had wept with her head against Diana's favourite damson tree, and gazed with streaming eyes at the forked branch from which Diana had picked gum. And all this emotion had been wasted, thrown away. Diana had returned to the bosom of her family, and had actually been discovered smiling!

Late that night Mrs. Wenderby came to Diana's room — she slept alone now — and sat at the side of her bed. Diana longed, as of old, to lay her head on her mother's dear knee and hear the familiar "settling" movement of the silk. But Mrs. Wenderby still looked — not stern — that was impossible — but aloof.

"You are not to return to school."

Diana did not speak. She knew that she was expected to express regret for a future devoid of many educational advantages, but honestly she could not.

"You will grow up ignorant, of course," con-

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tinued Mrs. Wenderby, still in that cold, aloof voice to which her children were so unaccustomed.

"I can study at home." Diana was very meek and humble.

Her mother's lips twitched ever so little. "I cannot imagine such a contingency."

"But I will. I mean it."

"You spoke just in that way the night previous to your going to school, and I — believed you. You promised to conform to the rules of discipline, and, from what I can gather from Miss Bub, you were in disgrace for impertinence the very day after your arrival. That was not playing the game."

"Mother, I am sorry, believe me, I am."

"Are you sorry for running away from school?"

"I am sorry, deeply sorry for the pain I have caused you and father. I never thought — never once thought that you would be anxious and distressed. It never entered my mind that you would even know. It seems extraordinary to you that I could be so thoughtless and selfish. I know you will never understand it, and perhaps not even believe me that from the moment I gave Miss Pilbank the slip till your telegram was put into my hand I — I never thought of you." In her earnestness Diana sat up in bed and clasped



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her hands round her knees. "I don't mean exactly that I didn't think of you, for, I *even* looked forward to the time when I should relate to you the history of my adventures, but I never imagined you would be anxious. You see I am so able to take care of myself that I find it difficult to believe that people do not realize this."

"Heaven help you if you had fallen into evil hands," said Mrs. Wenderby, with a drawn look on her white face; and for a moment her lips moved as if in prayer.

Diana watched her mother with melting heart.

"But, as it was, a good man and a kind-hearted Scotch woman came to the rescue, and I shall never be able to express my gratitude. Did *you* thank them?"

"I asked Pollie MacDougal to visit us."

"Oh! and is she coming?" Mrs. Wenderby could not suppress a smile. "And Mr. Phillimore and Mrs. MacDougal—are they coming too?"

"Well, I didn't invite them, but I am sure they would," said Diana promptly. She was glad to find that her mother could still smile, still joke. Her heart lifted a little.

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"Are you sorry that you are not to return to school?" The question was sudden.

"No."

"Well, at least, you are truthful." Mrs. Wenderby rose a little wearily. "If I were a properly constituted parent, I should send you back to-morrow."

"But you never have been. What I mean is, you and father are not like other parents." At the worship in Diana's eyes, Mrs. Wenderby felt a little comfort. She might have failed, but her child loved her; and that child had always been difficult.

"Good night," she said, turning out the light and moving toward the door. She had reached it. She had opened it, she had passed through — her dress moving softly — and was about to close it, when a cry of great bitterness rent the silence of the room: "Mother, you haven't kissed me."

For a moment Mrs. Wenderby stood torn with indecision: the child must be punished, *made* to feel the unutterable selfishness of her conduct. But yet — had it been all selfishness? — there were sins of omission as well as the other kind. Diana was young, passionate, headstrong, thoughtless, bubbling over with vitality — perhaps, she,

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Mrs. Wenderby, had committed an error of judgment in subjecting this wild, impulsive, untrained creature to the narrow and petty restrictions of a girls' boarding school. A sound of weeping came from the bed — a moment later Mrs. Wenderly had swiftly crossed the moonlit room and Diana was in her arms — their tears mingling together.

**BOOK II**  
**DIANA—A GIRL**

1

## CHAPTER I

Diana Wenderby had little to complain of life during the years that followed. The gods were kind to her, and it was more than she deserved, as Tommie was wont to say with an amused smile. Contrary to the teaching of her youth, and copy-book precepts and assurances that only the straight and narrow path led to bliss, Diana arrived at happiness through her *unmorality*. We admit she oughtn't to have done. That after her running away from school, she should have had a dull time. But she hadn't — we must be veracious. She spent six glorious years when she felt the nights were too long and the days were too short. When she sang perpetual Te Deums, and laughed simply because she was alive. And then the rain descended, as a poet, with unwonted poetical pessimism, assures us, it must, some time or other in each of our lives.

One afternoon she and her sisters — George was now in the Indian Civil Service and doing

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as well as the Service permitted — were summoned to the library, where they found their parents seated white and worn-looking, but with the never-failing smile for their children on their lips.

“What is the matter?” Diana never wasted time. One glance at the beloved faces, and she divined that there was something wrong. Her hand in her mother’s, she knelt on the floor and gently stroked it with the other. Victoria, sewing in hand — she was engaged now to a curate of a neighbouring parish, William Spong by name, and was busy with her trousseau — seated herself in the most comfortable armchair in the room, and Drusilla, adorably pretty, stood by the window, fingers drumming the panes, anxiety written on every line of her lovely April face. What was the trouble?

The story was soon told — bravely and simply. Mr. and Mrs. Wenderby had faith in their children. A story that has been told before, and will be again so long as the world contains a few tender-hearted, compassionate, generous-minded unpractical people: A friend — a friend, of their youth, falling upon bad times — the usual temporary embarrassment — had been guaranteed by Mr. Wenderby for a considerable sum of money

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— he had become insolvent, the guarantee had been called in. Then, there had been a loan to a relative, a cousin of Mr. Wenderby, a few years before. He, too, had died — insolvent. In addition, the trade of the country had been bad, dividends in Industrial Stock, once so sound and flourishing, had dwindled and dwindled almost to nothing. Their income was greatly reduced. They had economized, retrenched in a thousand small ways without their children knowing (they looked through the window), but now — well the guarantee had been called in — something drastic must be done. The carriage must go, and the servants — and, perhaps, *even* Moss Deeping. Their lips trembled now, ever so little. Moss Deeping — the home of their love, of their youth, of their great happiness — in the hands of strangers. Could it be borne? They did not say this aloud, but went on practically:

“If we could let Moss Deeping,” Mrs. Wenderby was speaking, “we could take quite a small house nearer to town, and then we should be able to manage ——”

“Let Moss Deeping!” There was real horror in Diana’s voice. “But it is impossible!”

“It would be hard ——” began her father.

“Hard!” She brushed the suggestion to one



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side like a fly; "it is impossible. Where else could you live?"

Mr. and Mrs. Wenderby themselves began to wonder where they *could* live. Moss Deeping was part of themselves, its stones, and soil, and grass, and trees, and flowers were their very blood.

"But ——"

"We must work, of course. Moss Deeping must be kept at any price. We must work — the three of us — mustn't we?" Diana looked at her sisters, challenge in her eyes. "We — we should love to work. We could make lots of money. We should enjoy it. We have been idle too long. Haven't we?"

Drusilla moved from the window. She had never been able to resist Diana. "I could teach singing," she said; "I could go as music governess in some school." Her voice was listless, but her eyes were brave. "I could earn a little, I think."

"And I — I could earn lots, I am sure." Diana didn't stop to consider by what means she proposed so materially to add to their income. At the moment she felt strong enough to conquer kingdoms — financial or otherwise. "Do you think — could you manage if we all three clothed and fed ourselves? How much money have you got?"

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Her directness startled them. Unpractical themselves, imaginative, inclined to dream more than to act, this sudden attack of the situation made them feel a little breathless.

"I don't quite know," stammered Mr. Wenderby, "at least not to a few pounds."

"Would you have enough to pay Job, one servant, coal light, rates and food — there is no rent — food for three of you if we went?"

But Victoria put in a word here. She was the eldest and declined to have her future arranged for her in this summary fashion — especially as she was engaged to be married, and therefore of added importance in her own eyes as well as, she trusted, in the eyes of the family. Then William was to be considered. William Spong, though of mild manners, had well-defined views as to what was correct or incorrect in the deportment of his future wife. Earning her own living would not enter into his programme.

"I am sure mother would need one of us at home — you rattle along so quickly, Diana — wouldn't you, mother? This house is large, you are not used to work, it would be necessary for one of us to remain to assist the servant, and I, of course, should be that one. Diana is not domesticated. Drusilla's voice means money —

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and — William could hardly spare me. We shall be unable to marry now in the spring, I suppose” — her voice quivered a little, she was genuinely fond of William Spong — “owing” — and now she hardened, “to — to this unfortunate business.” Her parents winced, but she did not see them.

Diana looked at her mother — longing in her eyes. Ah, if only *she* could be the one, and not Victoria, but Mrs. Wenderby averted her gaze. She must show no favouritism.

“Yes,” she replied hesitatingly, “I should need one of you. It is dreadful to think of any of you leaving us. We are grieved this has happened, aren’t we father ——?” She broke off unable to control her emotion.

“We don’t mind for ourselves,” Mr. Wenderby took up the story, humbly, apologetically, “but we should have thought of you children. It was selfish of us. We should have been cautious — we should have refused our friend. We were weak and too optimistic. We believed that the money would be safe. We trusted him, and we never considered you. As I say, we were guilty of great selfishness, and now you turn the tables upon us and ——”

“Don’t, father!” Diana knelt in front of him, her soul in her eyes; “don’t, *don’t* apologize.

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Can't you see how it hurts? We gladly go. Don't we, Drusilla? It will be real fun. Don't say any more. Just help me to think what I can do — what I can be. Time is — is passing."

They laughed at her enthusiasm. The tension was relieved.

"You will have to go out as a nursery governess. There is nothing else you can do." It was Victoria who spoke, whilst seaming some delicate embroidery to an equally delicate garment.

"A nursery governess!" Diana sat back elegantly on her haunches, and stared with horror at her sister. "A nursery governess! Impossible!" she whispered this to herself.

"You see you are fond of children, and could just manage to teach elementary subjects," continued Victoria evenly. "And sometimes the salaries offered are quite decent, and the governess treated well. Look how nice Mrs. Oldfield was to her nursery governess. She even invited her in to late dinner sometimes when there was a party ——" But Diana was not listening to her elder sister, she was staring through the window at a shrubby bed.

"A nursery governess!" she repeated mechanically to herself. "What a hideous prospect!" She forgot the others. Victoria's voice fell on un-

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heeding ears. Could it be possible? Could it be possible that such a life was to be hers? for somehow she knew that Victoria's words would come to pass. She would be a nursery governess — she, Diana Wenderby. She would be shut in, always shut in. Shut away from the sun and the wind and the sea. Shut away from the rain when the grassy banks and the earth smelt their sweetest. Shut away from glowing sunsets and starlight nights when, with Tommie, she wandered over the Common and down the dales. Shut away from the storms of winter, which filled her soul with exhilaration, and the pearly dawns of early autumn when she brushed the dew from the grass in search of mushrooms. She closed her eyes, and it seemed to her that she knew the meaning of the word "death." She felt she had died mentally; and physically she was icy cold. She would suffer again she knew. Probably her suffering, or the cause of it, would be more acute. But she would be prepared. She would have suffered before. That would help. She would have gained experience. She would have had this — this frightful pain. It would help her later on.

With an effort she opened her eyes. The room was the same, there was the same patch of sun-

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light on the carpet by her father's chair, Victoria was still sewing, Drusilla was still leaning over the back of her mother's chair where she had taken up her position when she left the window. The fingers of the clock on the mantel-shelf had moved on *one* minute, Diana noticed. And — she had tasted death in that minute.

She rose from the floor stiffly. She looked at her mother and smiled. Her lips felt hard and rigid, but still she smiled. "I will go out a little," she said. "We — we have lots of time to discuss all this. Haven't we?" She spoke quite cheerfully. Had she been on the rack she would have spoken cheerfully with that look in her parents' eyes.

She was still woefully ignorant. Sedan still "slipped." Jamaica was elusive, but her character had been growing. "I am going to talk to Tommie. He will be helpful. He always is. He will know at least of one dozen mothers amongst his friends who are requiring nursery governesses for their children at this very moment." She actually laughed as she kissed her mother on the cheek and her father on the top of his head before she left the room.

Victoria was not a student of human nature beyond that which was embodied in William

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Spong. "I believe she is quite pleased at the prospect of a change," she said, folding up her work neatly. "I suppose she finds Heatherland dull."

"Dull! You're a fool *even* to think such a thing, let alone say it." Drusilla spoke with the directness and heat of her younger sister, and stalked out of the room.

Mrs. Wenderby sighed, but said nothing, and Victoria, feeling thoroughly aggrieved at such an unexpected onslaught from the gentle Drusilla, went upstairs and changed her dress preparatory to the reception of her fiancé, who visited Moss Deeping on the evenings of Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, with unfailing regularity.

This happened on a day in early July, and the air, as Diana passed down the front garden, was fragrant with the scent of roses and newly cut grass. Job was mowing the long slope in front of the house. This task, performed weekly, was laborious, as the slope was of a fair gradient, and caused Job to pass his hand across his high brow with much frequency to remove the beads of sweat. He grumbled while he worked systematically and unfailingly. Diana paused for a moment to listen to him. Soon she, too, would be a

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worker, and already she was full of sympathy for those who earned their bread by the sweat of their brow.

"Would you like to retire, Job?"

He ceased mowing, wiped his hands on his corduroy trousers, and looked at her. It seemed such a futile question, and but for the excuse it presented to him of ceasing work for a short period, he would have ignored it altogether.

"Why not arst me if I wouldn't like to be King of England and Emperor of India while you're about it, Miss Diana?"

She smiled: "Because while one might be possible, the other would be impossible."

"Possible! Are you thinkin' of pensionin' me off? Because I won't say No." He grinned at his own witticism.

"Would you be glad to have nothing to do? Nothing to do from the moment you got up in the morning till you went to bed at night? Nothing to do but amuse yourself?"

Job spat on his hands and gripped with firmness the handles of the mowing machines. It seemed a waste of time discussing abstract problems that were never likely to affect him, with that long slope of grass ahead. He trundled after his machine, his curduroys creaking and



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squeaking — a sound so familiar to Diana. She did not resent his want of manners. She had always accepted his attitude that he had been “on” the garden before she was born, and had known her as a “squalling babby,” and could therefore hardly expect politeness.

She passed on through the little dell with its rockeries now filled with blossoming white rock and periwinkles on either side, down the wide stone steps, still veiled with close-growing fine moss where no tread of feet wore it away, and into the lane.

Old Mr. Sutherland’s house was at the other end of the lane where the ground rose sharply — a square, solid, uncompromising sort of a house, not unlike its owner. No curtains were visible at the early-Victorian windows, no climbers beautified the dull gray walls, few flowers bloomed in the front garden, which was arranged into neat sections of grass and gravel paths. A couple of poplars, with their mournful rustle, body-guarded one side of the house, and a statue — a faun, horrible, inartistic, and with a countenance more like Ally Sloper than anything else — stood to the left of the front door, giving the otherwise sombre house an almost rakish aspect.

Mr. Sutherland was a wealthy retired whisky

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distiller — a martyr to gout — and with two absorbing passions — his grandson and model dairies. Toward the former he was selfish — a great love so frequently resolves itself into selfishness. Tommie would have liked to embrace a profession. He was really clever — quietly, modestly, unassumingly clever — but his grandfather willed that his talents should be put to no purpose. At first Tommie had chafed, fretted, fought against his enforced inactivity. He tramped the country, either alone or with Diana, and gloomed and swore at his vapid existence. But that was some time ago when he had left Oxford with flying colours, and an enormous ambition. For months he hurled himself against the adamant will of his grandfather, always to be defeated. Old Mr. Sutherland might writhe in the clutches of gout, but he never “gave in.” Tommie had a thousand a year in his own right from his deceased father. Only a fool, Mr. Sutherland pronounced, would risk it in business. Besides, (to himself) he couldn’t do without the lad. He was a lonely old man, he would be still lonelier if Tommie went. Tommie was — well, very likeable.

Tommie was seated in a deck chair on one of the neat sections of lawn, reading and smoking,

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when Diana stopped at the gate and co-ood to him over the top of it.

"Will you come out a bit?" she called; "I want to talk to you."

"Rather. One sec while I get my cap."

They strolled up the hill — Heatherland had built itself on the slope of a hill, each of its few scattered houses rising one above the other, and while the Sutherlands looked down on the Wenderbys, the Wenderbys looked down on the Oldfields, and the Oldfields on to Doctor Wantage, the house of the last being right in the village. They reached the Common and turned down, as usual, into the dale — Diana's favourite walk.

The bracken was not yet fully grown — many of its fronds had yet to uncurl, and the heather was only just beginning to come out. But there was golden gorse, and above it white butterflies darted about, and the Dee lay like a shining jewel.

"Let us sit down," said Diana. She turned from a narrow path to a grassy bit of turf intersected with sprigs of heather. Tommie, punctiliously polite as of old, spread a large clean handkerchief for her. She brushed it to one side. "It is quite dry." Her voice was slightly irritated. "I wish you wouldn't fuss over me; you know I don't like it." She stretched herself full length

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downward, hands supporting her chin. She had taken off her hat and the sun on her smooth dark hair caused it to shine like blue-black satin. Tommie liked to look at it, dressed as it was with Spartan simplicity; parted down the middle and gathered up over the small ears into a coil, neither in the nape of the neck nor on the top of the head, but just halfway at the beautiful curve, it suited well the clear-cut, austere lines of the face. A curl or a loose tendril would have marred the whole effect. Was Diana aware of this? Tommie wondered, and, even as he put the question to himself, he knew that she wasn't. Her hair, not curling naturally, simply remained smooth and beautiful. Diana had no time or inclination for tongs or wavers, and she was intensely lazy in the matter of her personal adornment. To-day her pale face was paler than usual, and the set of her mouth was ominous.

There was something seriously the matter, Tommie divined. She would tell him presently; till then he could wait. Tommie was of a curiously patient disposition. For years he had loved Diana, and he had never once kissed her, never taken her into his arms, never touched her hand but with the touch of friendship. And yet he longed to do all these things — longed painfully,

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inexpressibly. He was a man of strong passions, but he never allowed his guard to be broken down. Once even weakened, his friendship with her would cease. This he realized. And if he couldn't have her as his wife, he must have her as his friend. He must have her somehow. See her, be near to her, talk to her, hear her voice. Diana gone out of his life would have meant that his life would have ended. Thousands of times he had to bite his lips to check the passionate words of love which were ready to pour forth, to clench his hands behind his back to keep him from seizing and holding her in a wild embrace. Three times during the years since she ran away from school he had asked her to be his wife, and three times she had refused him. And he still hoped. He would not accept defeat till he saw her the wife of another man. Then he was prepared to face a life of loneliness if it had to be. *Till* then — he summoned the whole of his philosophy to his aid and made the most of the moment. A moment with Diana was well worth a year with anybody else: the future he put from him.

He lay on his back now, arms behind his head, and unblushingly studied the girl's profile, and waited. He could wait for hours without speaking if Diana willed it and would remain near him.

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Presently she told him all. She did not look at him while she spoke, her eyes were on the distant hills in Wales. She did not pity herself to him, but her words were halting when she mentioned her father and mother:

"And their one thought was for us — for us children who are young and strong — never of themselves. No luxuries, no carriage and horse, one maid-of-all-work, saving and stinting it will be at every turn and they are both over fifty. Life is hard, Tommie."

For the moment he could think of no words to say. His distress was too deep.

"And not one word of reproach or reviling of the friend who has let them in. *I* should have cursed the day he was born, cursed him on bell and on book. And they simply defended him. Are — are people born like that — so good, so wonderful?"

"Some," said Tommie, "but not your parents. They have got there after a struggle, and that is why they *are* so wonderful. To be born good is luck. To become good is — a miracle." He spoke with difficulty. He was greatly moved. Mr. and Mrs. Wenderby had been more than father and mother to him.

"They *even* spoke of leaving Moss Deeping," Diana continued, "but, of course, that is impos-

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sible, so Drusilla and I are going out to seek our fortunes, *I* as a nursery governess, Drusilla to teach music in a school, if we can induce anybody to employ us."

She felt Tommie start. Unguardedly she looked at him, quickly she turned away. "Don't," she said involuntarily.

"I can't help it this time. I've kept my promise for a year — and God knows how difficult it has been. But now — Diana, is there still no hope for me? Don't shake your head — I'll wait through eternity. No"; he broke off with a bitter little laugh, "Diana still refuses me." He covered his face with his hands with an exclamation of supreme pain, and for a long while there was silence.

"Tommie, I'm sorry." She spoke very gently. She had never even done this before, thinking that a stony indifference might help him.

Now he looked up. Once again he was master of himself. "I believe you are, and — so am I, very sorry for myself." His smile of pain went through her. "But it can't be helped. You can't love me, so there's an end of it. I'm not such a fool as to ask: 'What can I do to capture your affection?' For I can do nothing. It's just me — plain me."

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She nodded. "And yet you're so attractive — so nice, so clever and — yes, even good-looking. It's strange," she mused with knitted brows as though considering a knotty problem, "and I'd much rather be married than be a nursery governess."

"I should prefer it myself," he observed drily, "and I can't imagine you in the position of the latter. I don't want to be rude, but I shouldn't hanker after being one of your pupils."

"No?" she laughed cheerfully. Tommie was getting more like himself. "I shall shake them like rats if they don't stand still while they are being dressed."

"Being dressed? Will you have to do that?" he asked in dismay.

"Probably. I believe a nursery governess's duties embrace everything under the sun, from lighting a fire to instructing the children on the prayer book. A nursery governess must be well educated, of a sound orthodox respectable faith, which really means Church of England, look and dress like a lady, do a servant's work, and receive an East-end shirtmaker's pay. No liberty is hers. If she goes to the post she must ask permission of her employer." She exaggerated, as



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she usually did when moved, and her eyes were dark with gloom.

"Sounds cheerful." Tommie moved restlessly. "And what pay will you get for all this?"

"Twenty-five pounds a year would be a handsome and liberal salary."

"Good Lord!" He sprang to his feet and pranced up and down. "And I have more money than I know what to do with," he muttered between his teeth, but Diana caught the words.

"It is bad form to refer to one's own riches," she observed.

Suddenly he seized her by the shoulders. "Don't rot, Diana. I can't stand it. It can't be. I never heard of a more astoundingly ridiculous proposition."

"What?"

"This going away and playing a fool's game. A girl like you and with your capabilities."

"Mention them," she said calmly.

"You can do lots of things. You can — er —"

"Exactly. That is what Victoria pointed out. I wouldn't learn from Miss Tipson. I — left Miss Bub's school. My knowledge is elementary. I can just read and write, and have not a single accomplishment."

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"But you know most things. Look what you've read."

"That will not bring in money."

"You — can sail a boat."

"My sex debars me from taking to the sea as a profession," she replied evenly.

He sat down again, clasping his knees with his long brown hands, a frown between his eyebrows.

"How can I help you, Diana?"

"You can't."

"But I want to. I must, I shall."

"She shook her head. "There is nothing you can do."

"I — I could lend you some money," he said shamefacedly. "It is accumulating. There is no way of spending it in a village."

"Give it to the poor."

"That's what I am suggesting."

"It cannot be. You wouldn't pauperize me, Tommie?"

"Indeed, I would," he returned, brazenly. "Diana, what shall I do without you?" He spoke lightly, but beneath it was a keen note of suffering.

"You'll find another friend," she said gently, laying her hand lightly on his sleeve.

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"Don't do that," he muttered; "take your hand away; I might break down. I'm not responsible for my actions this afternoon, Diana." He looked at her with hungry eyes.

"Perhaps it's well I'm going," she said. "We couldn't go on like this. Tommie, what a pity you care for me in this way. It spoils everything." She spoke earnestly, and without any self-consciousness.

"It does, indeed," he agreed with fervour. "I'd give a lot if I didn't. But there it is. I can't help it. I've fought against it, fought with all the strength I possess, and I don't believe you're worth it. I've said to myself: 'I won't see Diana to-day — selfish little beast!'"

"You've said that?" she asked, with enjoyment.

"Yes, I have, and meant it too. Then, within half an hour, round I've been at your place. Wanted to read you a passage in some damned book, or tell you some joke, or take you to see a bird's nest, or for a sail. I've wanted you for something. I always want you, you're such a — pal."

She rose to her feet and shook out her crumpled cotton gown. "Thank you, Tommie, and that's what I always want to be — a good pal. I

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couldn't be that if I married you. We're too much alike for marriage."

"What do you mean?" He followed her up the path admiring her slimness and free, lithe walk.

"It is said extremes meet. It may be a platitude, it may not be true, but I am sure you and I are too much alike in our tastes. We should quarrel."

"Rot! I'm not a quarrelsome sort." Tommie stated a simple fact.

"And we're too much alike in appearance even," she continued, disregarding his interruption. "I ought to be fair."

"I loathe fair girls, they always simper."

"And anything funny strikes us in exactly the same way. We don't laugh, but we feel uplifted. And anything moving makes us want to hide in a hole."

"Of course."

"And we're both selfish and frightfully conceited."

"You are," said Tommie, with feeling.

She laughed outright. Then, suddenly becoming grave, she paused in the narrow path and turned and confronted him. "And — you're not, and that's the whole trouble. You're too good for me, too horribly unselfish and decent

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and humble. I always feel ashamed when I'm with you. You've put me on a pedestal. You've idealized me, and I don't like it. All the time I'm shouting to myself: 'He doesn't know me as I really am. Some day he'll find out.' Tommie I couldn't live up to your standard in marriage. I should get tired and bored. I like saying nasty things about the people I despise, and when you're mute, or whistle softly to yourself, I — I could hit you. Then, I'm selfish by nature, and you're not. Your one desire in life seems to be to do kind things for people, and my one desire is not to do them. I — I fight against it, but you know how poor is the result. Sometimes a pained, surprised sort of little frown comes between your eyebrows at something I have done, and I feel a worm, and it's not a pleasant sensation — I ——” She stopped pantingly. She was genuinely moved and her eyes — usually inscrutable — were full of pity for him and grief for herself. “I am sorry if I hurt you,” and then with a cry: “Forgive me, Tommie, I'm a beast.” She swept up the path and disappeared from view.

And for a long while he sat at the side of the path just where she had left him, with his eyes on the receding tide, motionless, till the light began

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to fade from the sky, his hands clasped loosely round his knees. Then he rose and went home.

Later that night he stood outside the gate of Moss Deeping, his eyes on Diana's window. "God bless her and keep her," he prayed; "God bless her and keep her." Then he plunged into the summer night and struck the white road to Reston.

## CHAPTER II

Through the years Diana and Katherine Caruthers had kept up their brief ten days' friendship, and each admired the other prodigiously. Katharine had been filled with an awed wonderment at and admiration for Diana's flight. It seemed to her a story that should take its place with the legends of the Greek heroes. Katherine herself was of a soulful, artistic temperament, or so she liked to describe it to Diana and other admiring friends. Diana adored poetry and nature and everything that was beautiful, but didn't aspire to an artistic temperament. She felt it would require living up to. Katherine had no qualms in that direction. She parted her glorious auburn hair down the middle and arranged it in a classical knot at the back. She wore loose, green, low-necked, artistic gowns without shape; she never *walked*, but trailed about with languorous movements. W. B. Yeats in a brown suede cover, with flaps and rough-edged paper, was always in her hand.

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The two girls had not met for a couple of years. Katherine's latest developments — the green trailing garments and W. B. Yeats, for instance — were not known to Diana. They corresponded regularly, however. Katherine was now married and had become Mrs. Bruce-Napier and lived in a "dream" of a cottage at Windlesham End, near Bogmere, Surrey. She said her husband was "a dear," and hoped that some day dear Diana would visit them and she and her husband become known to one another.

A couple of days after the events of the last chapter Mrs. Bruce-Napier received the following letter from Diana:

"I am writing to know if you can, by any chance, help me to a crib as nursery governess in a 'respectable' family?

"My father has lost a good deal of money — we were never rich. Consequently Drusilla and I have obligingly undertaken to keep ourselves. She proposes to obtain a position as music and singing instructress in a school — her voice is divine. I — not being educated in any sense of the word — can see nothing for it but nursery governessing. I don't hanker after the job. I would really like to go into some sort of business and a friend would finance me, but the parents



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are against it. They say I am too young — I hoped they would add too attractive, but that they didn't mention. I have no fancy for the stage, have no accomplishments, no music, nor painting. So what would you? Housekeeping is not my *métier*. Isn't it woeful when you consider the number of incapable females who are turned adrift with nothing in their fingers, and no means of earning a livelihood beyond companioning some other luckless female (who has a little money, though) and inferior governessship? Poor derelicts! And they are so brave, so patient. And they sink, trample on their own individuality, on their own beautiful aspirations and ambitions, in order that they may get bread which they are unable to enjoy when got because of their dependence.

"But, I'm rambling on. And I'm not sorry for *myself*. Don't imagine that. Mine's the sort of individuality that won't sink. Shan't let it. And I'm fond of children. Love the little varmint. And the wickeder they are the better I like 'em. I like their thoroughness and carelessness of appearance. Isn't it delicious the way in which mere scraps of babies fly into wicked tempers, and, gathering themselves together and taking a good mouthful of air, let fly with an appalling yell?

"I'd like to be a proper nurse out and out, with a beautiful uniform and an air of sublime condescension, and a nursery maid beneath me. But

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mother objects. So, for etiquette's sake, it's a nursery governess-ship I'm seeking. Have you got that clear?

"I can't 'take' children over eight because they'd floor me in arithmetic. So if you know of a nice 'respectable' lady requiring a nice 'bright' girl, give her my address.

"Don't mention I'm not an officer's or a clergyman's daughter, as it might cause prejudice. You might refer casually to my maternal grandfather having been an admiral, but don't add he was dismissed from the Service for a serious offence. Embellishment is unnecessary.

"I'd like to be right away from here, because if I were anywhere within fifty miles, I should always be running home and leave the baby in a ditch.

"Perhaps you'll be too taken up with your new husband, who sounds the species of man I like best, to answer this in a hurry (though, now I come to think of it, you've been married some months. I know I've not recovered yet from your wedding present), but I wait expectantly,

"Your sincere friend,

"DIANA WENDERBY.

"A thirty pounds a year salary would meet the case. It's ambitious, I'm aware, but I shall be an extra special N. G., and my future employer will realize this at a glance if she's of fair intelligence. I could manage on that, I think. I'm economical in dress, and my only real extra-

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gance is liquorice — not in sticks, but lozenges—in fine Pontefract cakes, six at a time.”

On finishing this letter, Diana jammed her head against the pillows of her bed to drown her sobs. She felt the die was cast.

Within a week she received the following reply:

“I’m awfully sorry to hear of your trouble, and you *are* courageous. I don’t feel I *could* turn out and face the hard, cruel world, but, then, I’m peculiarly sensitive. (“Phew!” said Diana).

“It would be too delicious to have you near me, you dear thing; and there seems a possibility of this. Listen to my story: It so happens that an acquaintance of mine — a Mrs. Poppleton — who lives at Bogmere, is just seeking a nursery governess for her little girl aged seven, and a companion for herself. She leads a somewhat lonely life. Her husband, who is an artist (black and white and quite clever), is away in town most of the week. He cannot work at home, as he says there are too many distractions, so five out of every seven days he lives at his studio, coming down to Bogmere for week-ends. He is highly nervous, and passionately fond of Susie, the child. If she falls and so much as scratches herself, he is upset for the rest of the day. In fact so much is he on the *qui vive* about her that he says he cannot work at home. Personally, I think this is only half the story. I could imagine Mrs.

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Poppleton getting on a man's nerves, especially if that man were her husband. But I only know her slightly, so take my imagination for what it is worth. It is said that Mrs. Poppleton feels the enforced separation keenly. I don't know whether she is really fond of her husband, but hers is an orderly mind — she happened to call on me yesterday — this orderliness struck me more than anything else about her. I am convinced her attitude in the matter is: 'husbands and wives should always be together. They are one. To live separately, even when their affection has waned, is an outrage against conventionality, society, and the marital law.' Her mind seemed to me to be divided up into neat, orderly little compartments. She has no soul, I am convinced. I feel I ought to tell you all this. I could not live with a person without soul, but, then, I'm peculiarly affected by matter as set against mind. Material people don't enter into my scheme of life. ("Whew!" Diana whistled again.) But you are so practical, and breezy, and without nerves: you might find her quite companionable. The Poppletons' house is nice — two cottages turned into one, and enlarged — it is right in Bogmere, in the main street of the village — you can hardly call it a town. Two servants are kept and a boy in the garden. Mrs. Poppleton was greatly interested when I told her of you, and, of course, I said all sorts of lovely things about you. (Diana looked

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grave at this.) She wants you to write at once to her stating all your qualifications. This, I know, is merely a formality. She means to engage you if you will go to her. She held up her hands at thirty pounds a year. 'Twenty-five is what I give,' she said, 'and that is liberal.'

"I shall be longing to hear if you would like the post. Let me know as soon as it is settled.

"Ever yours, Diana, dear,

"KATHERINE BRUCE-NAPIER."

Diana read the letter twice through slowly and thoughtfully. She passed it to her mother with one comment — "I feel sorry for Mrs. Poppleton. I shall go to her if she will have me." Then she went in search of Tommie to tell him her news.

They had resumed their old relationship. Tommie, after a hard night in the open, had won back his self-control, his mask of indifference. His guard was up, he was the friend once more — the good comrade, the cheery, sympathetic, interested companion; and Diana accepted the position with gratitude and characteristic carelessness and light-heartedness. It was sufficient for her that she had regained her friend. She couldn't do without Tommie's comradeship and sympathy. She had relied upon it always and it had never failed her. Of that long hard night

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beneath the soft summer stars she knew nothing. Nothing of the soul and heart struggle of this man smiling at her now in serene and friendly fashion. Nothing of the hard dry sobs that shook and rent him as he sat beside the sea at the edge of the low cliffs. Nothing of the cold and fatigue that assailed his body as he crept home in the dawn to bed. How could she know? She was wrapped in a dreamless sleep. And if she had, what good could it have done? Nothing. It was on the knees of the gods — hers and Tommie's fate. Whether she would ever make him happy, they alone knew. And they kept their counsel.

"She won't like you," said Tommie, candidly, when he had heard her story, "and you couldn't be a companion to a woman."

"I am to Drusilla," said Diana, nettled.

"Because she's patient and sweet-tempered and adores you and is incapable and un-self-reliant. This woman will be capable and economical."

"How do you know?"

"She'll be economical because she jibbed at an extra five pounds a year and yet is keen on you," replied Tommie oracularly. "She's orderly, your friend says, and she's probably right. She'll be dull of mind and quick of fingers. She'll be

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faithful, stubborn, and without humour. When she's said a thing, she's said it, and will expect the same of you. She'll be unprepared for your changing your mind fifty times a day, and she'll resent it.

"I should like to know how you've arrived at all this?" asked Diana coolly.

"Natural deductions. It's quite easy. Mr. Poppleton is an artist and adores his child. The majority of artists prefer the country to the town. A beautiful and peaceful environment helps their work. An adoring father likes to be with his child. Some grave reason sends Mr. Poppleton up to town five days out of seven. That reason must be Mrs. Poppleton. Were she even interesting he would probably remain with her. Men are conventional and adaptable on the whole. Some enormous impetus must have forced him from her side."

Diana swung her heels to and fro. She was seated on a stile leading into the Sutherlands' croft. Tommie, with a palette and brush in his hands, was painting a patch of scarlet poppies flaunting themselves in a field of corn adjoining the croft. "I wonder," she said, "and I expect you're right. Poor Mrs. Poppleton. I'm afraid she's a terror. Anyway there'll be Susie to fall

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back upon. I can always make friends with children."

Tommie knew that Diana's face was soft at this moment, but he did not look up from his work.

"I wonder when you'll go," he said.

"Soon, I hope. I might as well get the — wrench over——" Her voice was steady, but despair was in her heart. When again would she be able to sit on stiles in the sunshine, swinging her heels to and fro and listening to the song of a lark? "Besides, cash is short, I expect, though they don't say so; and my appetite's large, and Victoria, who has begun to do the housekeeping — simply *made* mother hand it over to her — can hardly suppress a groan when I pass up my plate for twice of everything."

Tommie smiled. "You can put away a bit, certainly. Rough on economical Mrs. Poppleton." He laughed outright as he pictured that good lady's face at Diana's capacity for food.

"Tommie, will you do something for me? It's quite easy."

"Well?" His heart beat. When wouldn't he do something for her? Even to the laying down of his life if she needed it.

"Give me some 'rithmetic lessons before I go;



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I've forgotten everything — even long division, and I feel Susie's going to be sharp."

"I'll give you one now. I've got some paper on me. Get down from the stile and come here."

For an hour the two dark heads were close together, he explaining, she listening, and, for once, doing as she was told. From long division he took her on to reduction and proportion. She was dull, but he was patient. Bees hummed in a clover field close by. The lark poured itself out high above them. Diana became drowsy. She hated sums, and wished Tommie wouldn't keep saying "Do you see?" "Do you understand?" The figures began to run into one another. Then she was staring at nothing but a blur — a huge blur. "I'm tired, Tommie," she murmured, and she slid down with her cheek against the grass and fell fast asleep.

And so Tommie painted her. He had painted her dozens of times, but this was the first occasion on which he had got a good likeness. He caught the curious mixture of childishness and strength in the face, the petulant droop of the lips and the fine strong lines of the chin and throat. He couldn't get the eyes, for they were veiled, and perhaps that was why the likeness was so good. It was Diana's eyes that had

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always baffled him. He would portray them hard, scornful, unscrutable, and, lo and behold, before the paint was dry on the canvas, they had become tender, smiling, softly humid.

When Tommie had finished he leant forward and gently touched one of the brown hands lying on the grass.

She did not move.

Then, greatly daring, worship on his face, he knelt and laid his cheek against it.

Still she slept on.

The lark finished his song of happiness and dropped to earth. Tommie rose and crept softly away.

### CHAPTER III

Drusilla had no difficulty in obtaining a situation as music and singing mistress in a school. Her voice was Heaven sent. A Miss Graham — head of a large fashionable school on the outskirts of Liverpool — had the perspicacity to discover this, and that Drusilla had a good appearance. “My dear,” she cried, moved from her customary placidity, “your voice is of such purity that it reminds me of flawless pearls. Will you come to me?” The lady was quite excited.

Drusilla thanked her and said she would.

The new term did not commence till the middle of September. It was now July. She had a couple of months of freedom left to her. Diana was wildly jealous of this. “I know my Poppetons will wish me to go to them at once,” she cried in the privacy of her room. Drusilla had come to borrow some hairpins and had drawn a blank. Diana possessed about eight, which were all in her own hair, she said. “You’ll have the

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whole summer, and I shall be slaving in Bogmere," she moaned.

But she was mistaken, as she so often was. A week later — Mrs. Poppleton had not wished to appear too keen — Diana received a letter from that lady offering her the position of nursery governess, and at the same time saying she would not be required to take up her duties till the end of August, as she and Mr. Poppleton and Susie were going to the sea, and to take a governess with them would be an unnecessary expense.

But there was a postscript to the letter, and in that postscript was the kernel and the key to Mrs. Poppleton's character: "If it is necessary that you should leave home at once, you can join us at the sea, if you care to do so, without salary."

Diana's cheeks flamed, not with temper but out of shame for her future employer. *She* couldn't have penned such words had she been without a sixpence in her pocket. Presently she relented. Mrs. Poppleton might be very hard up at the moment. Mr. Poppleton probably kept her very short of money — an artist's was a precarious livelihood. Diana had formed a generous conception of poor lonely Mrs. Poppleton — she stuck to it now with fidelity.

She did not show the letter to her mother; she

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did not wish to prejudice Mrs. Poppleton in the eyes of her family.

"Well, I've got the billet," she spoke airily. She and Mr. and Mrs. Wenderby and Victoria were at tea in the drawing-room. The letter had come by the morning post, but it had taken Diana till now to become airy. The parents must never know of the pain she endured at the thought of leaving her beloved home. "I'm to have twenty-five pounds a year and all sorts of advantages not usually meted out to governesses who are nursery — such as supper with the family and Church twice on Sunday!" She grimaced a little at Victoria, who refused to see it. Church to Victoria meant William Spong in impressive vestments and white fur hood: three times a day would not have been too often for her. "But there's one drawback," Diana successfully hid the rapture in her voice, "I'm not wanted till the end of the summer. I — could you" — she looked at her mother — "could you manage to keep me till then? I know I'm a frightful expense and all that sort of thing, always wanting new boots or something — and Mrs. Poppleton will let me join them at the sea at once if necessary. So if you'd like me to go ——"

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"Ah, don't, Diana." Mrs. Wenderby put up her hand as if in sudden pain, whilst tears started to her eyes. "Don't put it like that. *Want* you to go! My dear, my dear! What difference *can* a few weeks make ——" She broke off unable to say any more, and Diana cursed herself for a thoughtless idiot. But here Victoria chipped in: "A few weeks make a lot of difference. I'm the housekeeper, so I ought to know, and George is coming home. How I'm going to manage seven on such an allowance I can't think. You'll have to increase it, father, if Diana remains. You must find it from somewhere."

"Be quiet, Victoria." Mr. Wenderby's voice was stern. He had seen the colour fly to Diana's cheeks. For an instant he laid a caressing hand on the head of his youngest daughter, then he walked out of the room and Mrs. Wenderby followed him.

"You *do* rub it in," cried Diana, fiercely, when the door had closed. "It's like turning a screw in a living wound. How — can you?"

"It is necessary. They are like two unpractical children." Victoria was perfectly composed.

"How dare you say such things?" Diana got up in a white heat.

"Well, it's true. It's all very well for you,

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but I and William are the chief sufferers through their — through their chucking — yes, chucking, this money away. We were to have been married in the spring, as you know, and now — we shall have to wait indefinitely, possibly for years.” She spoke in a strained hard voice, and passed a white hand across her forehead.

Diana looked at her sister curiously. It had always appeared strange to her that William Spong had expressed his willingness to accept pecuniary help from his future parents-in-law in order that he might marry their daughter, and still stranger of Victoria. She knew that had she been in her sister’s place and loved a poor man, out of very pride in him and for him, she would have preferred living on the merest pittance to accepting help from her parents.

“How much has William got?” she asked suddenly.

Victoria looked at the ceiling. She usually permitted her gaze to rest on its whitened surface when people asked impertinent questions.

“Don’t tell me if you don’t want to. I was unaware it was a secret,” Diana spoke apologetically. She was becoming quite gentle and polite these days. She felt she must make the most, the very most, of her home during the

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time still left to her, every stick and stone of it, including even Victoria.

Victoria relented. "Oh, I don't mind really, but, of course I have to think of William's feelings in the matter. He has — two hundred a year."

Diana sat down heavily. "And you won't get married on that?"

"Certainly not. He might, and I think would — men are a little reckless — (the very thought of recklessness on the part of William Spong moved Diana to sudden laughter, but Victoria fortunately did not see it), but *I* am too sensible."

"But I thought you loved him?"

Victoria moved uneasily. "It's because I love him I won't do anything foolish. Just think of it: a house, a servant, food, clothes, rent and the position a clergyman and his wife are bound to keep up."

"If I loved a man," said Diana slowly, "I'd marry him on a pound a week. We'd live in rooms or a tiny cottage and I'd do the work. I'd cook and bake and wash for him — I'd learn how. We wouldn't miss the best years of our life together."

"But" — Victoria stammered a little, — "there might be ——"

"No, there mightn't," said Diana calmly;



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“there’d be no children till we were better off. We’d help each other, and work up our way together and be happy and contented. Just think of it, all the glorious years wasted for the sake of appearances and what our neighbours think of us. Just think of the loss of the cosy evenings over one’s books, and the walks and talks and sitting in the hay or on the shore — for here in a country parish these things can be had for nothing. And when men and women are in love they don’t want anything but sunshine and flowers and enough to eat and drink, and to laugh with and talk to one another. I’ve never been in love, but I’m sure I’m right. And — Victoria, I’m ashamed of you.”

Victoria did not speak. With head bent she sewed diligently. Her trousseau, dainty and beautiful and every bit of it fashioned by her own tireless fingers, was nearly completed.

A step sounded on the gravel path outside and William Spong walked through the open French window into the room. He was a mild looking, kindly, be-spectacled man of about thirty-five, going a little bald about the temples. His clothes were as neat and well-brushed as a policeman’s, his linen spotless, his habits regular as the sun. His attitude toward Victoria was one of benev-

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olent affection and respect. When he kissed her on arriving and again on leaving, he did so on the forehead with eyes closed. Victoria's forehead was so pretty that most men would have kept them open. But not so William Spong. Had he kept them open he might have been tempted to kiss her lips, which was against his principles and prejudices. "A lover should keep himself well in hand," was one of his maxims. He was not in reality a prig because he was humble. If he had not been humble, he would have been detestable.

His feelings toward Diana were those of strong disapproval and an affection for her of which he was almost ashamed. He liked her against his better judgment. When she slapped him on the back he winced at the vulgarity of the action, but appreciated its heartiness and good fellowship.

It was incomprehensible to him how Victoria and Diana came to be of the same parents: Victoria so placid, so fair, so correct, so altogether satisfactory. And Diana — once in trying to describe Diana to a friend he called her a dark whirlwind of a termagant; and afterward in recalling the expression he was very pleased with it: A dark whirlwind of a termagant! It was

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apt, it was true. In Diana's presence he felt dizzy, and all-of-a-whirl, so to speak. His feet were cold and his head was hot, and his sensibilities all on edge. What would the amazing creature say or do next?

This afternoon her first observation caused him the sensation of having tumbled accidentally backward into a pond.

"I think you are so feeble, Billie" (he felt really distressed when she called him "Billie" in the presence of some of the more important of his parishoners), "not to make Victoria marry you."

"Oh — er," he said.

"Exactly. And that is what you say to Victoria — 'Oh — er,' and she remains Victoria Wenderby, whilst you, William Spong, live in dull rooms in the clutches of a rapacious landlady. Foolish of both of you missing some of the best years of your life together."

"But Victoria and I do not *think* my income sufficient to warrant the step of matrimony. Do we Victoria?"

"No, William."

Diana shook with impatience. "And do you always accept her 'No, Williams' with that placid resignation; because if you do Victoria will never

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be really happy when you are married. There are occasions when women like to be bossed and ordered about, even women such as Victoria. Otherwise they secretly despise their husbands. Do you want Victoria to despise you, William Spong?"

"Indeed, no." He spoke with a clutch at his voice, and his lips trembled.

"Well, then, what you should do now is to seize Victoria, literally seize her and carry her off, and make her marry you on your two hundred a year." And even as she uttered the words the thought of small thin William carrying off her large plump sister was too much for Diana's sense of humour, and with a smothered exclamation she ran from the room.

But she had sown the seed. William kissed Victoria on the lips that evening before he left her, and without shame.

## CHAPTER IV

On the afternoon prior to her departure for Bogmere, Diana went for her last walk with Tommie. Both were depressed; each tried to hide their depression.

"We will go along the Telegraph road," said Diana.

Tommie looked at her in surprise. It was the most unattractive road in Heatherland: straight and white and dusty, it stretched for two or three miles in an unbroken line to Reston. Telegraph poles and wires flanked one side of it, walls and hedges revealing flat uncultivated land, the other. It was a road Diana had always avoided. Now it seemed to fit her mood.

They trudged along in silence. Diana was battling with her tears. Tommie knew it and could find no words to comfort her. Every now and again he swore to himself beneath his breath; used a succession of bad words mechanically and methodically, but they brought no relief. Blank despair was at his heart. What should he do

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without Diana? The months before him, empty and desolate, heaped themselves up before his eyes: the long evenings with his grandfather, the long days of autumn and winter and — no Diana. There were his books, there was his horse, there were walks, an occasional day to Liverpool, an occasional festivity in the village — not much for a man who once had had ambitions, even if almost dormant now. Tommie was unhappier than Diana if she had but known it.

“Let us turn into this cornfield for a bit,” he said, mopping his hot face.

She followed him obediently, and seated herself with her back to one of the cocks and tilted her broad-brimmed hat over her eyes. Tommie leant against another, facing her. The field was encompassed with high hedges, there was no view beyond the dusty road. Tommie therefore studied the top of Diana’s hat. He wished that she would take it off, as she so frequently did, so that he might gaze for the last time at her blue-black satin hair and clear profile and smooth throat, take his fill, imprint every line on his memory, to last him through the months. But she was in perverse mood to-day. She tilted her hat a little farther forward, and crossed her brown-shod feet.

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"You will write to me, Tommie?" she said suddenly.

"Why, of course." To him it seemed a futile question. Of course he should write, and she to him. Her letters were all he had to look forward to. He had already settled to himself that she would write to him once, if not twice, a week. He looked at her hat brim disapprovingly. He was surprised at her question. It lacked intelligence. They had been close friends and companions for fifteen years or more, and she calmly asked if he meant to write.

"I expect I shall wail a bit," she said. "I *must* wail to somebody."

"Of course." If Diana lacked intelligence, Tommie lacked originality of speech to-day.

"You won't mind?"

"I want you to tell me everything as you always have."

"Thank you," she said; "how kind you are to me."

He shuffled his feet. She put it that way—"How kind you are to me," just as she would to any friend, and he was ready to remove mountains for her.

"I wish you'd put your hat back," he said after a time, with some irritation.

"Why?"

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"I want to talk to you." This was not the truth; he wanted to look at her.

"What about?" She raised the hat a couple of inches, and peered up at him from beneath the brim.

"I want to ask you something."

The hat went down with a flop.

"Not that. Don't be alarmed." His voice, in spite of himself, was bitter. It would have been a pity if Tommie, with his sweet, kindly nature, had become soured.

Diana removed her hat, and sat up quickly. She felt a trifle ashamed. "Well?"

"I want to ask you if your mother and sisters know about — about my caring for you."

She shook her head. "Not that I know of."

He was amazed. "You have never told them?" He could scarcely believe it. He was filled with incredulity.

"Why should I?"

"I thought girls always told their mothers that sort of thing."

"Perhaps they do, but I don't."

"And your mother, has she never raised any objection to — to your being so much about with me?"

"Never."



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"But most mothers would." Tommie seemed to have acquired considerable knowledge of the behaviour of mothers and daughters under certain conditions.

"Mine is not like most," said Diana calmly. "Besides, she likes and respects you above all other men. I've often heard her say so."

He blushed with pleasure. He was very simple was Tommie Sutherland.

"But the world, the village, doesn't it" — he floundered a little — "doesn't it ——?"

"Talk about us? Of course. It's bound to. It's talked for years. It's beginning to stop. It's got tired. My character's in shreds, you know."

"What!" He sat bolt upright. He looked grave and troubled. Anxiety swept across his countenance. "I never thought," he muttered, "never once thought — selfish brute that I've been, infernal idiot!"

"I don't mind ——" began Diana, but he snatched the words from her.

"Then you ought to," he said vehemently. "A girl ought to mind. And if you don't, I mind for you. Good heaven, what can I have been thinking about?" He sprang to his feet. "Come home," he said, peremptorily.

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She rose meekly, too astonished to argue. Tommie in such mood was unknown to her. She looked at him in amazed wonderment. Her respect for him had increased a thousandfold. He swung along the dusty road, muttering to himself angrily and inaudibly: His Diana, his cherished one, his beloved one talked about, discussed, her name bandied about by the villagers, by the Oldfields, by Doctor Wantage, even used lightly, disparagingly, with a wink and a shrug of the shoulders, and through him — through him who not only loved, but respected her, above all other women, and whose one thought and aim should have been to guard her fair name.

"I can't keep up," said Diana at length, pantingly. They were already out of the Telegraph road and had turned into a green leafy lane. "If you wish to walk like a whirlwind — leave me, go on."

He stopped, and now she nearly walked over him.

"I'm sorry," he said penitently. "Diana, why haven't your parents stopped this — if — if I've been such a da — blind fool?"

She softened toward his distress. "Because they haven't thought it worth while. They have never discussed it with me — but I know them.

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They are not conventional. They have never considered the opinion of the world. Their outlook on life is broad. So long as the thing is right, really right, nothing else matters. They know you well. They believe in you. They trust you. They have looked upon our friendship as something wholesome and — good.” A faint colour crept into her cheeks, but she kept on steadily. “They knew how much we relied upon one another for companionship. Why should they stop it? Because of the chatter of a few ignorant, evil-minded people? I told Miss Pilbank when I was at school that I realized I should have a dull time if I worried round about marks — well, you will see the connection, and I haven’t had a dull time. Tommie, I — I thought you were big, and above all this sort of thing, and if I don’t mind, why should you?” She smiled up at him sweetly, her eyes frank and fearless; she was touched by his emotion. She stopped walking, and unthinkingly in her desire to help him she put her hand on his shoulder — and — in a moment, in a flash, Tommie’s self-control of years broke down, was swept away. He seized her violently, held her closely, and covered her face, her eyes, her lips, her throat with burning kisses, then pushed her from him, his breath

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coming in gasps, the sweat standing out on his forehead, his eyes full of passionate defiance. He was prepared for anything. He felt he cared not for all her righteous anger, cared not a whit. Later he would be sorry, ashamed, but not now. He was but human nature. He was not a god, he was made of flesh and blood the same as other men. She expected too much of him. Defiantly he stood, his shoulders squared, his eyes, dark and smouldering, full on hers, his head set back ready for the storm, but he was unprepared for what followed — Diana never did the expected thing — there was no storm. Instead, a great humility. For a while she stood shrinking, drooping, almost afraid, afraid of what she had roused in the man before her. Then, as with a supreme effort, she threw back her head; "I am sorry," she whispered with lips that were white, "it is my fault. Don't even ask me to forgive you, Tommie, for that would hurt me more than anything, make me feel more ashamed. I—I have tried you too far, and I have partly known it, but not so much as this—I did not understand. Forgive me. You have always been so splendid that"—now her eyes brimmed with tears—"I began to believe you were different, you were not as other men. I believed, in my selfishness, that I could say and

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do anything, demand so much from you — your time, your companionship, your eternal sympathy. Demand everything and give nothing in return. And yet not quite nothing” — her face lighted a little — “for you said friendship was better than nothing ——” She paused, her eyes on the ground. “But I’ve been a poor friend, and, Tommie, I’m sorry. Always give on your side, and always take on mine. I shouldn’t have sought you knowing what I have, shouldn’t have tried you so sorely. What you have just done serves me right. It is *I* who am ashamed. *You* needn’t be. It is what I deserved. And now, good-by. I shan’t see you again. I will go home alone, and I leave early to-morrow. But before I go,” and she looked at him now straight in the eyes, fearlessly and without shame, “I want to tell you that if I *could* love you, I would. I would rather love you than any other man in the world — but I *can’t*.” Her voice dropped on the word in a sort of despair, and she left him.

He watched her till her white figure was lost to view, then he sat down on a heap of stones at the side of the lane and tied up a loosened shoelace. The task took a considerable time to achieve. His hands trembled as with an ague.

## CHAPTER V

It was on an afternoon of rain that Diana arrived at Bogmere, the peculiarly wetting drizzle that converts everything into a kind of oozing sponge. Darkness was descending as she drove from the station along a road usually white, but now drab and sticky, and her spirits sank lower and lower. She felt grateful to Mrs. Poppleton for not having met her, but, at the same time, she felt aggrieved at not receiving this little attention. Her mother had predicted that Mrs. Poppleton would be at the station. Miss Tipson had always been met, but then had not her mother every fine instinct of a gentlewoman, and was not Mrs. Poppleton utterly without? Diana decided in her customary sweeping fashion as the cab rattled along the main street of the small country town.

Mrs. Poppleton was full of pleasurable expectancy at the arrival of Diana, but to meet her nursery governess on a day of soaking rain never entered her remotest thoughts. She had a tendency to rheumatoid arthritis — it wasn't this

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in reality, nothing so devastating or painful, but just a little everyday commonplace rheumatism which careful dieting and daily exercise would soon have banished. But Mrs. Poppleton liked her complaints to be serious, and her doctor, with unusual professional intelligence, early discovered that if he wished to remain her professional attendant he must designate an ordinary sore throat as tonsillitis, a feverish cold as influenza, and a little stiffness and slight enlargement of the joints as rheumatoid arthritis. What did a name matter one way or the other? A medical man, young and ambitious, mustn't stick at trifles. Had Mrs. Poppleton exhibited leanings toward neuritis instead of arthritis, neuritis she should have had.

Anyhow to have ventured out on an afternoon so damp would have been to court rheumatic fever at the very least, but Mrs. Poppleton took up an early position at the front door with Susie at her right hand to give Miss Wenderby a becoming welcome.

When Mrs. Poppleton stood in doorways she nearly filled them. She was large and big-limbed. She had been described by a few as a fine woman. Susie, on the other hand, was small for her years, a thin little mite with large wistful blue eyes,

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and hair pushed back from her forehead with a flat ribbon ornamented with loops just above the ears. She wore a quaint, old-fashioned stuff frock and ankle-strapped shoes, and looked exactly like pictures of "Alice in Wonderland," Diana thought as she stepped from the cab.

Mrs. Poppleton extended a large well-formed hand, and Susie shyly held up her face to be kissed. Diana liked her at once, and pressed her tiny hand.

"Susie will show you the way to your room," said Mrs. Poppleton graciously. "You would like a wash before tea, I am sure — we have had it late to-day. The man shall bring up your trunk. I wonder you did not send it as advance luggage. The system is a saving of time as well as of money. You would, by sending it on first, have been spared the expense of two cabs as well as numerous tips to porters.

"I did not think of it," said Diana, with her foot on the first stair — Mrs. Poppleton was entirely blocking the way of the driver and the trunk.

"Nor your parents?"

"Oh, they never think of anything like that," she returned.

"They are unpractical?"



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"I suppose so, or I shouldn't be here," said Diana, slightly irritated. She did not intend discussing her parents with her new employer, however large and impressive that employer might be. "And, excuse me, but the man is trying to pass you."

Mrs. Poppleton gave the back of her new governess a searching look as she walked up the stairs accompanied by Susie, a straight, independent-looking sort of back, she decided, and the coat on it well cut. She braced herself unconsciously as she went into the dining-room to make the tea. She even looked thoughtful. The kettle was not yet boiling on the stand. Mrs. Poppleton glanced about the table. She went toward the sideboard, halfway she stopped and went back to the table and gave it another scrutiny. Finally she returned to the sideboard and reached out the best cake, which she placed prominently near to Diana's place. Then she sighed. The best cake was one and eight a pound.

Meanwhile Susie led Diana down a passage, the floor of which was covered with cream India matting, to a small bedroom excessively clean and equally comfortless. Excessive cleanliness, when too obvious, strikes a note of chilliness.

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The floor was laid with brown, highly polished linoleum, upon which reposed one rug of nondescript colour at the side of the small white bed which was pushed against the wall. The walls were distempered a dull fawn, the toilet ware was plain, shiny white. Involuntarily Diana gave a shudder which she as quickly suppressed. Had she not made one hundred good resolutions that morning? Was she going to break them so soon?

"I am glad your parents are un — un — well, what you said to mother," said Susie, seating herself on a chair and crossing her small ankle-strapped feet.

"What? I don't understand."

"Unpwactical, I think was the word," Susie stammered. "You said if your parents were not that you wouldn't be here."

"Oh, unpractical." Diana was amused.

"Yes. I'm glad you are here. I like you, and I think you're awfully pretty."

"You dear mite," said Diana laughing. "Have you ever had a governess before?"

"I have had three since my last birthday."

"Three?" There was dismay in Diana's voice.

"Yes, and two of them were quite nice. But nobody stays long."

"But why?"

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"Mother is so particular; I heard Miss Grayson, she was the last, say so. Take care, you are splashing. You will wet the mats. Mother doesn't like people to splash. Miss Grayson wet right up the wall. Perhaps if you are going to do your hair you would like me to go?"

"Not at all," said Diana, surprised. "Why should you go?"

"I have noticed ladies don't like doing their hair before little girls," replied Susie placidly. "I like your hair, and it looks nicer without a hat." She regarded it thoughtfully. "It's like black satin — no, it isn't, it's like a blackbird's wing with teeny sort of streaks of blue in it. I found a dead blackbird in the garden last winter, it had died of hunger. Your head is as little as mine. All my governesses had large heads, but they wore frames the same as mother."

"How do you know?" Diana strangled a laugh.

"I saw bits of it peeping through the hair. You can always tell frames from real hair, it is duller and frizzier."

"I see. You are keenly observant, I notice."

The child looked at her governess without understanding.

"What I mean is that you notice everything."

"Some things, but not the same as mother."

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Father says mother could see through a bolted door. Do you think she could?"

"I don't know," said Diana cautiously, and then added gently, "and I don't think you should ever repeat what your father and mother say before you. It is what is called 'not playing the game,' Susie."

"I don't understand you."

"No, it's difficult, and I am afraid I can't make it clear to you. But you take my word for it. Never repeat what grown-up people say before you." In her earnestness Diana knelt in front of the child and took her little hand in hers.

"Here's mother," said Susie, but without eagerness.

"I thought you were never coming down, the tea is nearly black," said Mrs. Poppleton. She looked at them suspiciously. "Susie, you're in a draught." And from that suspicious glance Diana immediately realized she must not allow Susie to become too fond of her, or there would be trouble.

Mrs. Poppleton led the way to the dining-room — a pleasant, warm-toned, harmonious room, which looked on to the road. The drawing-room was at the back. "We will show you the house presently," she said graciously, as she took her

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place at the head of the table, while Susie climbed on to a chair with a cushion opposite to Diana.

"Both sugar and cream, or are you fashionable?" This with playful badinage. Later when Mrs. Poppleton made efforts at playful humour Diana always somehow thought of a cow trying to waltz in a field. "And this is your first place?" Mrs. Poppleton asked questions in a detached sort of way, Diana found, as though without interest in the replies. But this was only superficial, her interest was really enormous.

"Yes," said Diana. The word "place" would have caused Victoria to wince, but it in no way affected her younger sister. Indeed, she hardly noticed it. It *was* a place, or a situation, or an engagement, or a job. It all meant the same thing to her, and she had come to fill it to the best of her ability for the sake of the dear parents at home. She pictured them now in the library with its pleasant atmosphere and deep, comfortable chairs. There would be a "bit" of fire because of the damp and gloom of the day. Tommie probably would be there, his lithe body huddled up in a corner of one of the roomy chairs, his long legs curled one round the other. He would, with his customary kindness, be trying to cheer them up. He would guess that they would be lonesome

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and down with two of the "children" gone. An unexpected tear splashed into Diana's cup, and she choked in, what Mrs. Poppleton thought, a most unladylike manner. But Mrs. Poppleton was quite kind, if surprised, as she asked, "You are homesick?" Yet, when Diana nodded, she felt aggrieved. For a new governess to be in any sense unhappy when such kindness — even to best cake — was being showered upon her, was unreasonable, not to say ungrateful. She always took it as a personal affront when people were depressed in her presence. She had been known to exhibit impatience toward a newly bereaved widow who had broken down on her first meeting Mrs. Poppleton after her trouble.

"Susie, hand Miss Wenderby the cake; no, not the soda, but the plum."

Instinctively Diana knew she would be eating soda cake to-morrow, and a smile rose to her lips. It looked home-made, and "sad" in the middle. How Tommie would laugh when she told him of this; the same things always tickled them. Because of the occurrence of the previous afternoon, because Tommie's guard had been broken down for a few brief minutes, Diana had no intention of not writing to him. Not to write to Tommie would have meant a real deprivation and loss to

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her. He was to be the dumping ground for all her worries and troubles, he was to be the sympathizer as of old. Besides, even had she had any idea of punishing both him and herself by refraining from writing, she could not have found it in her heart to do so after a note she had received from him the night before. It was brief and to the point: "If you genuinely meant this afternoon that forgiveness should be on my side and not on yours — to be plain — if you meant that because I forgot myself for a mad, wild moment and kissed you it was through your fault and not mine, prove it by writing to me as often as you have the time and inclination."

Mrs. Poppleton cheered up at Diana's smile. A bright governess was infinitely preferable to a tearful one, and much better for Susie.

"That's better," she said briskly. "I hope you'll never be depressed before Susie. The child is so sensitive and impressionable. She has been difficult to rear. Her father and I feared we should lose her. She was only three and a half pounds when she was born."

"You said four to Mrs. Owen the other day," corrected Susie. She seemed aggrieved at having lost half a pound in so short a space of time. At this rate she felt perhaps that her weight at birth

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would be reduced to nothing if her mother were allowed to have it all her own way.

"Well, four then," Mrs. Poppleton conceded, "but, Susie, you should never repeat what daddy or I say."

Susie did not mention that this was what Miss Wenderby had said upstairs a few moments previously. She was a wise little person.

Tea over, Mrs. Poppleton suggested showing Diana the drawing-room. She was apparently very proud of her house.

She threw open the door with a flourish, but before she had time to enjoy the expression of admiration on Diana's countenance (or what she hoped would be admiration, for she expected and demanded this from each of her governesses in turn when the room was exhibited to them — and when you're a nursery governess it's wise to comply with what is expected of you so long as your powers of veracity are not too much taxed), she was summoned by a maid to the kitchen.

"I'm sorry," she said vexedly. "There's something always going wrong in the house. I'll be back presently."

And Diana felt grateful for this call from the regions behind. It saved her from much equivocation, for what could she have said that would



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have been satisfactory to Mrs. Poppleton? The room was dreadful, a nightmare. And it had started out so well, that room — that was the pity of it. It had started out to give one a sense of space and ease and comfort. The chairs were roomy and low, the few pieces of large furniture were well chosen. The colour of the walls subdued and beautiful, the pictures good. An artist — Diana imagined, perhaps Mr. Poppleton — an artist with an eye for colour, a sense of harmony, a gift for arrangement, had first been at work here, and if left alone the result would have been perfect. But Mrs. Poppleton appeared on the scene. Diana knew it was Mrs. Poppleton. She knew it from the dress Mrs. Poppleton was wearing, which was fussy: bows, and tassels, and ruches and jabots, and bits of braid and buttons appeared on every conceivable and inconceivable place on Mrs. Poppleton's person, and bows and ruches and braids and buttons appeared about her drawing-room in the form of china pigs, ivory elephants, silver frogs on the mantel-shelf and tables, or wherever she could get them in. Silver taper-holders, match-cases, and many useless articles crowded the walls between the beautiful pictures, and white satin cushions embroidered with ribbon forget-me-nots were heaped on

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the couch. A gilt French clock with pink enamel cupids crawling about it was bizarre and horrible, placed cheek by jowl with a lovely bit of Della Robbia pottery. Yes, Mrs. Poppleton had flung herself about the room generously and without stint, and Diana wondered if the pink cupid clock had been the final straw, and sent poor Mr. Poppleton flying out of the house with every artistic sensibility on edge and outraged.

She knew in her present mood — homesick and depressed — she would be unequal to diplomacy and skating over the thin ice of an unequivocal attitude toward Mrs. Poppleton's cherished drawing-room, so she fled to her own room to unpack. But she had only got as far as hanging up her gowns in the diminutive wardrobe when there was a tap at the door and Mrs. Poppleton entered the room, a little gaspy from an obviously too hurried ascent of the stairs.

"Miss Wenderby," she said, "there are one or two little points I would like to mention to you in reference to this — your bedroom (she spoke as one referring to some holy of holies). I am very particular about my house, and expect my servants and governesses to be the same. I wish you to be careful when performing your ablutions." (This sentence always mystified Susie, who in no

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way connected it with the use of soap and water.) "The walls are distempered, as you will have observed, and every mark of water shows above the splasher."

"Couldn't you raise it then, or have a larger one?" Diana suggested practically.

Mrs. Poppleton was unaccustomed to suggestions from her governesses, but she did not resent this one. She saw that Diana wished to be helpful.

"Perhaps; I never thought of it. We can try it. Then, please don't drop scent, or any sort of toilet preparations on your dressing-table. The French polish has been kept almost intact, and the least drop of scent would leave a mark. Your furniture is chippendale-mahogany."

Mrs. Poppleton said this in the same way as people speak of a Velasquez or a buhl cabinet, and Diana felt awed at the prospect of living and sleeping with such furniture in her room. "One more little suggestion — please put your fingers on the finger-plate of the door and not on the white paint. Not one of my governesses has ever observed this."

"Perhaps the finger-plate has not suited their respective heights; why not have two?" Diana was still anxious to be helpful, but this time her effort failed. Mrs. Poppleton fixed her with

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what she liked to feel was a surprised, authoritative, and, at the same time, quite kindly glance, and then left the room.

And an hour later Diana was initiated by her employer into the most important of her multifarious duties — namely, putting Susie to bed.

To put a child to bed sounds simple. To put Susie Poppleton to bed was a task immense and full of complexities. It was the hardest duty of the day, and coming at the end of the day found the governess with little reserve of strength to draw upon. A day with Mrs. Poppleton seemed longer than a week with anybody else. Diana, when she crept into bed that night, now understood why Mr. Poppleton lived the greater part of his life in town. Had he lived altogether at Bogmere he wouldn't have been alive, which sounds a paradox but is nevertheless true.

Mrs. Poppleton, possibly in reply to an unspoken question, but one which was clearly written on Diana's expressive countenance — why should the governess put Susie to bed when there were two servants in the house?—condescended to explain the position. "I dare not trust my child to the tender mercies of ignorant, uneducated people. She is too frail, too delicate, and I should have no confidence in their rubbing her properly.

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When she has finished her warm bath, she must be thoroughly sponged down with cold water, and then rubbed with this rough towel for exactly ten minutes by the clock. In the morning she simply has the cold sponge and rubbing. Our desire is to encourage her circulation, which is bad, and strengthen her muscles. When the rubbing is finished, she must touch her toes twenty times—to render her impervious to chills. You don't know, Miss Wenderby, what it means to rear a delicate child. But see, I will show you exactly what is to be done each night and then there can be no mistake. First, kindly ring for the water and bath, which Mercy, my housemaid, prepares while you are undressing the child. Thank you. Her best hair ribbons are kept in this box in the right-hand drawer, and her everyday ones in the left. They must be folded round and round the finger, so; that keeps them nice and fresh. You will brush the hair with this hard whalebone brush till her scalp tingles ——” Mrs. Poppleton was obliged here to pause for breath, which was always a little short, and Diana got in a word — “How shall I know when it does tingle?”

Mrs. Poppleton gave her a searching look before replying, but finding her governess absolutely grave

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and bearing every evidence of a desire for information, she said: "Susie will call out, won't you darling?"

The child nodded her head with a bored expression. "This tingling means the blood has been brought to the surface and encourages the hair to grow." And Diana stored up this knowledge for the benefit of William Spong. "Are you attending, Miss Wenderby? Each garment you shake as you remove it, and hang up on the different chairs to air. The stockings are turned wrong-side out and hung on either side of the doll's house — thank you. Now my little girlie is ready to jump into her bath. And here is a flannel apron, and after it is dried it is kept in this drawer. Oh, Miss Wenderby, don't splash so much, and heavens! we have forgotten to close the windows." She made a heavy leap for one open about a couple of inches, and in her haste slightly jammed one of her fingers, causing Diana a hard fight to keep back her laughter.

"Never forget to close the windows on entering the nursery. It was most careless of me to overlook them. And please be quick (Diana, to tell the truth, was quite enjoying soaping the soft little body); she has been in long enough. Now for the cold sponge — and now, the rubbing.

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Not *quite* so hard, Miss Wenderby; you will take off the skin. Did she hurt you, my darling?"

"Not a bit," said Susie, lying bravely. She had taken a tremendous fancy to her new governess, and longed to lay her cheek against the bent dark head.

"You *are* lovely, dear," she whispered. "Will you carry me in your arms to bed?"

"What are you whispering about?" demanded Mrs. Poppleton, suspiciously. "Quick, into your nightie and slippers. Fasten the dressing-gown tightly, Miss Wenderby, and this shawl comes last. I have shut my bedroom windows — she sleeps in my room — and in half an hour's time you must return and open one a little way, when Susie is warm and asleep. I will come and hear my birdie's prayers."

Outside the nursery door Susie held up her arms, and Diana, stooping, picked her up, and held her closely to her as she ran down the passage.

"I *do* like you," said the child as she was popped into bed; "will you stay with us a long, long while and — *not* splash?" Mrs. Poppleton was putting final touches to the nursery.

"I certainly won't splash," said Diana, laughing. The other question she left unanswered. Could she stay a long, long while? She had ar-

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rived full of pity and loyalty toward Mrs. Poppleton, loyalty that one woman—when nice—feels for another woman when neglected. She came determined to make a friend of Mrs. Poppleton, to show her sympathy for her in a thousand little ways, to be kind to her, and considerate, and as helpful as she could. That was only a few hours ago. Now she wanted to show her sympathy to *Mr.* Poppleton, to do kind things for him.

She and Mrs. Poppleton had a cold supper at eight o'clock. They then sat in a small breakfast-room and sewed. Diana ran a tuck in a new petticoat for Susie, and Mrs. Poppleton talked to her. She talked of her husband and child and servants the entire time, and when the husband was under discussion Diana's cheeks burned. No actual complaint was lodged against him, nothing disparaging was actually said, but Mrs. Poppleton's whole attitude was one of patient martyrdom, an attitude frequently adopted by women who are not clever toward husbands they regard as not satisfactory "When my husband condescends to honour us with his presence each Saturday," or, "Susie is highly nervous, she takes after her father. He, poor man, is unable to live with his family owing to his nerves. He can't



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apply himself to his work; he says we make him — jumpy.” A little laugh here, but without mirth. “Oh, yes,” in reply to a question of Diana’s, “I like the country well enough, but, of course, when we settled here for the sake of Susie’s health, I naturally imagined her father would be with us, but it was a misconception on my part.” Another mirthless laugh. “Not that I am complaining. When one marries an artist, well — she marries him. I once read the artistic temperament shouldn’t marry. I don’t remember where I read it, and I don’t say I agree with such a statement, but — I sometimes wonder if the author hit upon a truth. What do you think? But, of course, you’re too young to have formed an opinion upon such a subject — yet I was married at your age — twenty-three. Susie was born ten years later — not for *ten* years, and do you know, Miss Wenderby, Chris, my husband, cried for joy when he first took her into his arms, and I — never was so happy in my life.” Diana moved uncomfortably. Surely the sacred moments, the beautiful holy places of life, should be left untouched, inviolate, secure in the hearts, and precious to the memory of those to whom such moments have been vouchsafed? Diana was reminded of a bull — not in a china shop, but in a field of delicate snowdrops

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trampling their pure and exquisite fragility to earth. But Mrs. Poppleton continued — she was not sensitive to a discordant atmosphere — “And now he spends five and a half out of every seven days away from us in town, where he pigs — that’s what I call it — in chambers — a couple of rooms, one his bedroom, the other his studio, and an old intemperate woman looks after him and gets him his breakfast. And the dust” — Mrs. Poppleton was apparently unable to find words sufficiently strong for the dust, for she passed on — “and the studio here is magnificent, built out at the back, and cost ever so much, and a splendid light, and it is never used . . . .” The voice trembled here ever so little, and, somehow, in spite of her deep pity for the absent Mr. Poppleton, Diana unexpectedly struck a chord of pity too for the present Mrs. Poppleton. Perhaps it was hard, hard for both of them.

“Good night,” she said gently. She felt she could stand no more to-night, and she folded her work and put away her sewing materials in a basket, a parting present from Drusilla.

“You are going to bed early.” Mrs. Poppleton was the practical employer once more. “But perhaps you are tired. We breakfast at half-past eight and are very punctual. Please come to my

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room for Susie at half-past seven. Mercy will call you at seven, or a quarter to seven. It depends how long you take to dress."

"Seven o'clock will do, thank you, and will you tell Mercy to hammer at my door, or even kick it, till I answer? I'm a very heavy sleeper."

"Kick your door!" Mrs. Poppleton's eyes widened with horror. "And what about my paint, please? I never heard of such a suggestion. No, I will instruct Mercy to go in and *shake* you, if you have no objection."

"None whatever," replied Diana placidly. "Good night, Mrs. Poppleton."

## CHAPTER VI

Saturday, the day when Mr. Poppleton was expected, appeared to Diana to be a long time in coming.

She was all agog to see Mr. Poppleton. She had heard more about him in the period of four days than she had heard of anybody, with the exception perhaps of Napoleon, during the whole course of her life.

Susie constantly chattered of him during their daily walks. Her darling daddy said this, and her darling daddy did that — always in a voice of adoration. And Mrs. Poppleton spoke of him fifty times a day, and always in a voice of mild complaint.

— And now Saturday was here. The midday meal was over and Diana and Susie were in the nursery. Diana seated in a low chair, a book in her hand, reading aloud. Susie flat on the floor in the sunshine. For an hour each day the little girl lay in this position to rest and strengthen her back; and always in the sunshine when possible.

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Sunshine was so life-giving, said Mrs. Poppleton ponderously. Mrs. Poppleton's simplest statements appeared ponderous because of the depth of her voice and the size of her person. She was O. S., she had announced to Diana when describing to her a model gown she had secured at the summer sales at an enormous reduction. Unable in the first moment to see the connection, Diana had wildly thought of the clever O. S. associated with *Punch*. Could the immortal lines which brought delight to her and Tommie each week be thrown off by the large and stout lady before her? She clutched at her hair and at her reason. "You see," continued Mrs. Poppleton, unaware of the chaos wrought in Diana's mind, "being outside size I am frequently enabled to pick up astounding bargains," and when her governess made a queer sound in an endeavour to suppress a laugh, Mrs. Poppleton imagined a crumb had gone the wrong way in her governess's windpipe and passed her some water.

Susie had assisted Miss Wenderby to find the sunniest spot, and then asked her to draw close to her so that she could watch her lips curve while she read, and see the sun on her hair. "And do you think Dora will have a proposal to-day?" she asked. "I *do* hope so." To Diana's surprise,

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she found the little girl was half through "David Copperfield," and had in fact had half a dozen of Dickens's works read aloud to her.

"What do you mean by a proposal?" asked Diana teasingly.

"When a man asks a girl to marry him," returned Susie promptly. "I love proposals in books. The ladies always blush and look so beautiful, and have red roses in their belts. Have you had many proposals, Miss Wenderby?" And now Diana blushed, while Susie stared at her unwinkingly, and the more she stared the hotter Diana grew.

"Little girls shouldn't ask questions like that," she said reprovingly, pushing her chair out of Susie's range of vision, and picking up the book she read for some time, till, becoming tired, she put it down and said, "Tell me what your father is like." She was anxious for the child's description before seeing Mr. Poppleton in the flesh

"Can I get up while I tell you?" asked Susie; "the hour's nearly up, and I couldn't talk about daddy when I'm lying on my back. Can I get on your knee? And I'm sorry I asked questions you don't like; I'm very sorry. I love you so, Miss Wenderby, and I hope you'll never go away and leave me."

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Diana gathered the child up on her knee and laid her cheek against the fair hair. "All right, Susie girl. Now fire away," she said, "and tell me exactly what he is like. You must be dressed soon to receive him, and have a nice pinafore on."

"Well, he's very big, and frightfully, frightfully strong, and sometimes he carries me on his shoulder and it's scrubby —— " Susie paused reminiscently.

"Scrubby?"

"Yes, when he's going to shoot."

"But I can't see because he shoots that his shoulder should be scrubby," said Diana argumentatively.

Susie, in her vehement desire to explain, almost stammered — "It — it's his coat. When you're going to shoot you wear a rough scrubby coat, very shabby and old, with a belt hanging down at the back. Mother doesn't like the coat. She says it's a disgrace; but it has the loveliest smell like a fire when it's got wood on it."

"I know," said Diana, with inspiration; "it's made of Harris tweed." She had smelt Tommie's coats.

"That's it." The child jumped up and down at her governess's perspicacity. "Harris tweed, and it's got a hole in the elbow which mother

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won't darn because she says it encourages him in his —— ” She stopped suddenly. “I oughtn't to say what mother says?” She looked inquiringly at Diana.

“No,” said Diana gently. “And does father often wear the coat?”

“Yes, because he shoots a lot. His pictures are full of partridges and ducks and — and pheasants. See, I will show you what father draws ——” She jumped down, rummaged in a big box and staggered back with half a dozen *Illustrated London News, Graphics* and *Fields* in her arms.

“We will put them on the table,” said Diana, “and then you can come back to my knee and show me, and tell me all about them.”

Soon she was as deeply interested as Susie in the drawings before her — all illustrative of wild bird life. One entitled “Partridge Driving” was extraordinarily clever, and all of them were strong, original and full of life.

And so Mr. Poppleton found them a quarter of an hour later. He had come down by an earlier train than was his custom; and Mrs. Poppleton, arrayed in her best, and Susie in her clean pinafore and with neatly brushed hair, were not, as usual, on the front doorstep to receive him.



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He opened the nursery door softly, and for a moment he was not seen, and in that moment the quick, receptive, artist brain caught the impression of a picture never to fade throughout his life: The two small bent heads — one so dark and of such exquisite shape, and the other so fair and childish with its looped ribbons of blue. The absorbed look on their faces. The protecting arm of the girl encircling the child's tiny frame and revealing the lines of her own slight and beautifully moulded figure. And the face of the girl! Not so beautiful as so fine, so unusual, so extraordinarily vivid and alive. This girl lived every moment of her life. Even in her dreams the soul must leave the body, Mr. Poppleton felt, and wander away in search of fresh experiences, only to return when the body regained consciousness and another wonderful day was to be lived through. Who was she? Mr. Poppleton's gaze absorbed her. And then Susie, suddenly divining his presence, jumped to the ground and across the nursery and flung herself rapturously into his arms. "Daddy darling," she cried, "this is Miss Wenderby, my new governess."

A governess! This girl, his child's governess, and a nursery one at that! This girl in his employment, and was to receive from him in payment

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for governessing his child twenty-five pounds a year! Princely sum! Good heavens! Mr. Popleton grew hot at the very thought. And she was standing in front of him so gravely, almost meekly, waiting for him to shake hands with her if he felt so disposed. Shake hands! When he had much ado to keep from falling to his knees and apologizing to her for employing her as his governess at all.

"How do you do?" he blurted out at last.

"Quite well, thank you," returned Diana. He did not see the faint quiver at the corner of her lips, or know that she had right away, in her customary impulsive fashion, conceived a great liking for this burly, awkward-mannered employer of hers.

"I did not know you had come, and — the other had gone. You see we have so many — I mean ——" He realized his slip and was covered with confusion.

"It is a little complex," said Diana, unable to restrain her laughter, "and must be difficult for your memory to retain — us all. I — I am sorry."

He joined her in her laughter. He saw she was sensible and had a fine sense of humour, and he was relieved and cheered at once.

"I hope *you* will be a permanent institution,

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and that this scallawag will treat you well. ~ Eh, Susie?"

"What's a permanent institution?" she asked.

"Stay with us a long, long time," said Mr. Poppleton gravely. And he looked at Diana, it seemed to her, almost beseechingly. Had he become tired of so many governesses? Was he weary of all their frailties and shortcomings, a résumé of which she could well believe would be related to him by Mrs. Poppleton within an hour of his arrival each Saturday afternoon. Now that she saw Mr. Poppleton in the flesh, his rugged, *good* face, his frank, friendly eyes; now that she heard his laughter and pleasant if somewhat loud voice, and had become acquainted with his whole simple, unassuming, almost boyish, personality, her heart indeed went out to him in pity.

"Is there no tea knocking about, little one?" he asked.

His question was replied to by Mrs. Poppleton, who sailed into the room — sailed into the room in a purple cashmere gown, very tight at the waist and in the sleeves; very over-trimmed and fussy, and devoid of a single graceful line or fold.

Each week-end found Mr. Poppleton wishing his wife would not dress up to receive him. It gave him an unhomely feeling; it gave him the feeling

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that he was at a party, it gave him the feeling that he must jump about and hand things at tea, when after a hard week's work he yearned to sink into one of the deep, comfortable armchairs and be waited upon. He did not see that the ugly purple gown represented a tragedy—the tragedy of a woman fighting to regain the lost affection of the man she loved. He did not know of the time Mrs. Poppleton spent in her room each week in adorning herself, endeavouring to make herself fair for her husband's eyes — the carefully applied powder to the somewhat florid countenance, the waving and curling of the hair, the fixing and adjusting of bows and ruffles and brooches and jewellery. The squeezing into tight slippers. The pathos of it all! The pity of it! When Mr. Poppleton liked quiet, subdued colours, and simple, unadorned gowns, and longed for the time when the hideous purple dress would be worn out.

“There is tea in the drawing-room as usual,” said Mrs. Poppleton. Tea was served in the drawing-room on Saturdays and Sundays, when everybody but Mrs. Poppleton longed to be at the comfortable dining-room table. “How are you, Chris?”

Mr. Poppleton kissed his wife on the forehead. Diana thought of William Spong. Did all lovers

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and husbands kiss on the forehead with closed eyes? And even as she put the question to herself, Tommie's passionate, burning embrace rushed to her mind, and the colour flew to her face at the memory.

"You have come down earlier than usual." Mrs. Poppleton sounded slightly aggrieved, and she *was* aggrieved. She liked to be found in her purple dress on the doorstep with Susie at her side when her husband arrived. She felt they made a pleasant domestic picture, and she appreciated the fitness of things.

"Yes, any penalty?" There was irritation in his voice. "I had finished my work, and I suppose a man may come to his home when he likes — " A laugh here. He was apparently already ashamed of his irritation. "Come on, let's go and have tea. I'm longing for some home-made scones. Susie, lead the way, my cherub."

"There are no scones to-day," said Mrs. Poppleton, quite distressed; "you said last week that you were tired of them."

"Did I? Very foolish of me. Well, I expect there'll be something equally good. You generally have nice teas — " He was making manful efforts at friendliness. "Come on, Miss Wenderby. Miss Wenderby and I introduced ourselves, Laura."

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But she was not interested in this information; she was too worried about the scones.

They filed into the drawing-room, and Mr. Poppleton took a chair with his back to the pink cupid clock. "How do you like the place?" he asked Diana when they were all served with tea and bread and butter.

"Oh — er, very much, thank you," stammered Diana.

"I didn't mean the situation but the village, or town, as it now likes to call itself. Sorry you had to tell a fib," he laughed in a jolly fashion. "My fault."

Mrs. Poppleton looked down her large well-shaped nose. Such joking with a perfectly new governess she considered in bad taste.

"Oh, I think the place is sweet," said Diana, "and the country round is charming. I have never before been in Surrey."

"You come from? — "

"Cheshire."

"Oh, of course. You're the friend of Mrs. Bruce-Napier, who lives over at Windlesham End. Been to see her yet?"

"No, but I thought of going over there to-morrow afternoon, if agreeable." She looked at Mrs. Poppleton interrogatively.

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"Why, of course," said Mr. Poppleton, impulsively, "and it's a pretty village — well worth seeing."

"Miss Wenderby was speaking to me, Chris," said Mrs. Poppleton with a gulp. "Sunday afternoon would be a most inconvenient time for the governess to go out. There is Susie to look after, and I, naturally, keep myself free for Mr. Poppleton, but I will make an exception in your favour on this occasion, as I expect you are anxious to renew your acquaintance with your friend."

"But I suggested Sunday as possibly being more convenient than any other time," said Diana calmly, but respectfully. "You see, I hope you will be able to spare me one afternoon each week, and I don't care which it is so long as I can depend upon it." To do Diana justice she was unaware of the awful effect this speech of hers was having upon Mrs. Poppleton, or she would have waited till a more fitting season to make it.

"I don't think I quite understand you." Mrs. Poppleton, in her agitation, permitted some crumbs to fall from her lap on to the floor. "Do you mean that you are under the impression you have an afternoon off to yourself once a week?"

"Yes."

"But you are labouring under a mistake, an

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extraordinary mistake. I give no afternoon to my governesses. I did not refer to this in my letters when engaging you, as it never entered my thoughts that you could expect such a concession.

"But don't you grant any liberty to your servants?" Diana had forgotten Mr. Poppleton and Susie. Forgotten that she was a subordinate, forgotten that she had her living to make. All she remembered was that this woman in front of her had just pronounced the amazing fact that she was unprepared to grant a few hours' liberty to her governess on one day in each week and that governess was herself.

"Certainly. My servants have an evening out; all servants expect it. But — a governess — never. They do not require it. They enjoy all our privileges. They take their meals with us, even to supper. In fact they are always with us." Mrs. Poppleton was unable to perceive that all present required second cups of tea. She was too upset to perceive anything at the moment beyond the outrageous attitude her governess had taken up.

"And isn't that sufficient reason that they should desire a little time off occasionally?" demanded Diana breathlessly. "Servants at least



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can sit in their kitchen, can sit by themselves when their work is finished. They are not compelled to merge the whole of their individuality, body and soul, into that of their employers. But the governess — forgive me, I dislike to be personal, but I must try to make my case clear to you, to make you see my position — ” She was very much in earnest. She was not only fighting for herself and her rights, but for the rights of all the future governesses of the Poppletons. “I have not been alone, not had one half hour to myself in which to rest or read or write, excepting when I’ve been in bed, since I entered your service last Tuesday. I am not complaining, believe me. I am willing to work my fingers to the bone, to spend myself for you, if I can count upon a few definite hours I may call my own on one day out of seven.” She had risen from her chair. She was confronting Mrs. Poppleton. Her hands clasped behind her back, her face tense and eager.

Mr. Poppleton watched the two women in silence, shame at his heart. That this girl should have so to plead with his wife. This splendid girl with her fine air of breeding and subdued, well-controlled voice — plead for what should have been hers by right. When would all the women who worked for their livings, and when

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gained almost too tired to enjoy — the nursery governesses, lady helps, companions, band themselves together, form themselves into a union to demand that most priceless of all possessions, a little liberty? he asked himself. He was full of sympathy for tired people.

Diana, turning suddenly, surprised the expression of pity and shame on his face, and at once was sorry that she should have raised this question, created this "scene" before him. She dropped back into her chair. "We will talk of this some other time. I am sorry I spoke of it now. But somehow the question cropped up." She smiled nervously, and helped herself to a piece of best cake without invitation — angry with herself for her tactlessness.

"It was through me," said Mr. Poppleton. He, too, was nervous, nervous of his wife. But he meant that the subject should be thrashed out. One by one the governesses in the past had drifted away, drifted away because they were tired physically and mentally, and were mostly without spirit and too tired to stand up to Mrs. Poppleton. But this girl should stay if it lay in his power to keep her. "It was through me. I asked you if you had been to Windlesham End, and you hadn't. But — you are going to-morrow. Isn't

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she Laura?" His eyes met those of his wife challengingly, steadily. To soften his words he got up and laid his hand on her shoulder. He was sorry for her, he was generous enough always to be sorry for her, and because of his sorrow he rarely crossed and opposed her during the brief time they were together. But this time he must make a stand. "Isn't she, Laura? And you will try and manage an afternoon off for Miss Wenderby. It will take some arrangement——" He addressed Diana now, and tried to joke. "You will understand the dislocation of the domestic machinery if some change is abruptly made in it. But it can be managed. I, for instance, will undertake the charge of the scallawag—it can easily be managed. Can't it Laura?" Now he looked at his wife entreatingly.

But there was no reply.

Mr. Poppleton returned to his seat and swore beneath his breath. He repeated his question persuasively. Still there was no reply. Mrs. Poppleton sat like an image of stone and stared though the window. She had many methods of expressing displeasure toward her husband and this was one of the worst, and always appalled him.

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Gallantly he made efforts at conversation. He passed his cup to his wife, he passed Diana's cup. Mrs. Poppleton filled them without relaxing a muscle. Automatically she dropped lumps of sugar into the cups, automatically she added milk. Then she returned to her window gazing. The others sat — stricken. One by one they finished their tea, and crept from the room. Little Susie was the first to go. She knew this mood of her mother — it frightened her. Diana followed her. Mr. Poppleton was the last. Later he would return. Later he would return and make the best of the situation. Patch up their difference, smooth things over. Lie, and say he was sorry. He wouldn't wish to return. But conscience would drive him to that drawing-room, drive him to the side of his wife. He should have sided with her and not against her, or been mute. Whatever his feelings in the matter he should have stood by her. It is an unwritten law in the matrimonial partnership: "Husbands and wives must pull together in public." Later on he could have pleaded with her, argued with her, bashed her head, so to speak, if that had been his inclination; but not before Diana and his child. He had put himself in the wrong. She, sitting Sphinx-like in the drawing-room, staring through the window,

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was right. Mr. Poppleton groaned as he stumped about the garden when he contemplated her "rightness." And he had so frequently to contemplate this position. She was so often right.

An hour later Mr. and Mrs. Poppleton, Diana and Susie were to be seen crossing the fields to the old Mill on the way to Windlesham End. Mr. Poppleton and Susie were engaged in running races, and Mr. Poppleton was laughing and shouting at the top of his voice. He had made his peace with his wife. He had gone back to the drawing-room and kissed her. It went against the grain, but he went through with it. Mrs. Poppleton had faint stirrings of generosity too. She would give Diana her half holiday. It would be terribly inconvenient. But it should be managed somehow, if she herself had to drop through the extra work entailed. But he, her husband, should not have interfered. And if he had he should have taken his wife's part. She had been put at a disadvantage, she had been humbled in the presence of her nursery governess. Such a position was outrageous. "I know," said Mr. Poppleton, "I am sorry. Are you coming for our usual walk? We shall just have time before it's dark." He spoke gently. When he scourged his flesh, he did it thoroughly. It was

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good for his soul, he knew. He could not face martyrdom perpetually. His strength was not sufficiently great. So five days out of every seven he lived in town. On the other two he suffered bravely if not gladly.

## CHAPTER VII

Diana made an early start for Windlesham End on the following afternoon.

Mr. Poppleton's impulse had been that he and Susie should show her the way, but on second thought he refrained from making this suggestion. He divined that she would like to be alone at this her first taste of liberty. As observant as an observant woman in some respects, he could not fail to notice the springiness of Diana's step as she came in to dinner, the light in her eyes, the expression of expectation at coming delights on her countenance as her gaze fell upon the fields and woods from the window. Mr. Poppleton had seen the same expression in the eyes of captive creatures about to be released from their imprisonment. The movement of the small head recalled to him the movement of captive birds — which he had so often sketched — on first sighting the open door of the cage. She was a wild thing by nature, chafing at restraint. He felt it had been well that he had been present on the previous

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afternoon and gained for her these few hours of freedom, in spite of his blundering and failure to come up to the recognized standard of marital loyalty. Otherwise, of a surety, Diana would have slipped through their fingers. And there would have been more wailing and gnashing of teeth to face, and another governess with every accomplishment and virtue under the sun to search for and find.

"No, Susie," he said in reply to a question (she had been prompted by the same impulse as her father), "we won't walk with Miss Wenderby to Windlesham End. I guess she wants to be quite by herself this afternoon, and is tired of little girls. You and I will go in the very opposite direction. In fact, if by any chance we happened to stumble across her between now and seven o'clock, we would cut her, wouldn't we?"

Diana threw him a grateful look and a smile as she passed out of the front gate, which he held open for her, and into the road.

Mrs. Poppleton intercepted the look from the window, and a shadow passed over her face. She sighed deeply, and to-day more comfortably, as the bodice she was wearing was not so tight as the purple one of yesterday. Her husband seemed to understand everybody but herself, and every-



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body adored him. To do her justice, Mrs. Poppleton was not jealous of other women. She had absolute confidence in the fidelity of her husband. She might not be able to keep him very closely at her own side, but she was of the conviction that no other woman could keep him. The fault lay not with her, but with his queer, difficult artistic temperament. And all the misunderstandings and friction that arose between them she placed to the same source — his difficult temperament.

Never did she consider the possibility of the fault lying with herself. He had chosen her for his wife from among all other women; and she had made him a good wife. She was the mother of this child, she was an excellent and economical housekeeper. She had been told she was good-looking, and she considered that she made as good an appearance as most women of forty; in fact she had "worn" better than he, who frequently looked haggard, red-eyed (the hours he spent over his work late into the night to provide the pretty comfortable home for his wife and child she knew nothing about, and would have disapproved if she had known), and old. His hair was becoming thin at the temples, his skin, due to his close confinement, was blotchy. Had he not been a big, finely made man, he would have been ugly,

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but his size saved him; and his genial, jolly personality was wonderfully attractive.

Diana, conscious that she was being watched from the window by Mrs. Poppleton, walked sedately along the road till the house was lost to view. Then, turning into a field path which was the prettiest way to Windlesham End, she proceeded some distance with elastic footsteps till she found a quiet, secluded sunny corner, and lay down, her head—from which she removed her hat—against a grassy dry bank. The country stretched away undulating and pine-clad. A mild, warm sunshine bathed the landscape, the sky was cloudless and of a pale, pure blue, a soft haze hung about the farthest hills.

Diana stretched herself luxuriously, and pillowed the back of her head on her arms. There was nobody about. The Sunday lovers arm-in-arm kept to the main path some distance away. It was too early to call just yet on the Bruce-Napiers—it was not three o'clock.

She was thinking of Tommie. They had spent so many Sunday afternoons together, and she had often returned to tea with him and old Mr. Sutherland, a tea unattractively served, but bountiful and good.

She missed Tommie more than she imagined

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would have been possible. She did not love him, but she missed him. For years he had made the difficult places of life smooth for her. Now she had to fend for herself.

She drew some paper and a pencil from her pocket and wrote to him:

"This is the first opportunity I have had to write to you since I came. I am 'at it' from seven-thirty in the morning till I go to bed at ten at night. Then I am too sleepy to do anything but tumble into bed.

"I was frightfully glad to have your letter. I have read it quite six times. Please always write just in the same way all the lovely home bits: What father said, how mother looked, how Victoria was comporting herself — isn't that a good word? Victoria does *comport* herself — what they had for supper. All that you are doing and reading and thinking. Of course, I've read 'Kips' ages ago. I recollect telling you all about it. But I think I'd rather be in a draper's shop and sell flannelette at 2½ than be a N. G.

"I told you I should wail. But I'm only going to do it *once*. Then I shall join the ranks of the world's heroes and heroines and 'suffer in silence.'

"This is my trouble: Mrs. Poppleton's a fool. If she was a knave or a rogue, I could forgive her. But you and I never 'suffered fools gladly.'

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She has the very nicest husband imaginable, a straight, simple, good, big-hearted fellow; as clever as they are made at his work, full of enthusiasm for all that is fine and beautiful, devoted to his child, *has* loved his wife once, of that I'm convinced, and she's lost him, let him slip out of her life, because she's a plain fool. And I could cry about it all. Weep over the tragedy of it, and at the same time shake her.

"'In what way is she a fool?' you will ask. 'And are you sure she is?' will be your next question. And then you will observe in your polite, diffident sort of manner: 'You have rather a habit of jumping to conclusions and settling everything in too summary a fashion.'

"I know all about that, Tommie. I often make wild mistakes and *you* never rub it in by saying 'I told you so.' And that's why I'm your friend. But this time I'm right.

"First of all I'll tell you why Mr. Poppleton has ceased to love Mrs. Poppleton, and then you'll understand in what direction her foolishness lies.

"She takes no interest in his work — which is clever beyond praise. Black and white — birds that live. Partridges, pheasants, wild duck, grouse, snipe. He must have spent hours, days, months, years in studying their habits. You can hear them cry as they fly over the moors, the harsh discordant notes of the duck at night. You can see their startled runs and hurried flights at the sound of the guns. Wonderful they are. And

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then his book illustrations — studies in grays and sepias, all neutral tints, subdued, harmonious, delicately suggestive.

“He came in full of an idea to supper last night. There had been trouble in the afternoon, but he had forgotten it. A new picture — for he paints as well — he was eager, enthusiastic as a boy. She interrupted by a comment on the beef-steak pie. It was insufficiently glazed — the crust. She must reprimand the cook. She spoke of the delinquencies of the cook for some minutes. His enthusiasm fell away from him. He became silent. Gradually he became irritated because she was worried. Nice men don’t like their wives worried. Finally he suggested the cook had better leave. He wished to be helpful. Then she got in a temper. She said he always wanted to drive the servants away. He was so hard to please, and they were so difficult to get, and she worked the whole week to make his home comfortable. The end of it was, he banged the door when he left the room.

“When she isn’t talking of the servants, she talks of the child. This he can stand till she begins about her delicacy and all the ailments she has suffered during the week. Then he goes white and miserable. He worships Susie, and she *is* a dear mite, and really not particularly delicate. But Mrs. Poppleton, for some reason, likes to think she is, and refers constantly to the trouble she has had in rearing her.

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"She never by any chance talks of anything interesting. She neither reads papers nor books. She is a strong Conservative. When she discovered that my principles were Liberal, she raised her eyebrows, and remarked that she thought only common people were Liberals. She writes a good many letters to relatives, does a lot of sewing, pays innumerable afternoon calls, worries her servants, and takes an occasional walk on the level.

"But I am trying not to dislike her too much. Indeed, I am struggling to like her because I am sorry for her. Pity is akin to love, and I *do* pity her — because she still loves her husband, and his love for her has vanished. A one-sided affection must be — excuse me, Tommie — the very devil! Nothing else expresses it.

"I now understand why I have been sent here. I understand my mission in life. I understand why I have been created. It is to bring Mr. and Mrs. Poppleton together again. Isn't that a noble object, a fine impulse, a magnificent thought? Diana the peacemaker! The federation of the countries of Europe sinks into insignificance before it!

"Now, I must say good-by. I am on my way to make a call on the Bruce-Napiers. Am sitting against a bank. Am to have Sunday afternoon to myself always. Mr. Poppleton has gained me this privilege. It led to a quarrel between him and Mrs. Poppleton (my peacemaking hadn't started then).

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"I'm homesick to distraction, to despair, almost to suicide. And I'm so sorry for myself that it helps me. Sympathy *does* help.

"Always your sincere friend,

"DIANA WENDERBY."

She continued her walk thoughtfully. She was picturing Tommie walking along the shore. They had usually gone there on Sundays — tramping across the glistening hard sands when the tide was out, and along the edge of the cliffs when the tide was in, to Westerton, and home through the fields to Heatherland. She missed Tommie woe-fully, more than she imagined would be possible. She wished earnestly that she loved him sufficiently to marry him. She liked him so much, he interested her so greatly. Yet, there was no love in her heart for him — nothing but a calm affection. Her heart never beat excessively when she heard his footsteps, her pulses never quickened, she felt no excitement when she met him, she experienced no thrills when he touched her or sat close to her. William Spong — in an emotional way — would have moved her as much. Musingly she passed through the fields till she struck the road leading direct to Windlesham End. Would love ever come to her? And in what way? And would she know when it came? Would she be conscious

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of it? And would it bring her happiness? Love so frequently meant suffering. Tommie suffered. His face was aging, his dark hair was sprinkled with flecks of gray, his laugh was not so happy as of old. Suddenly Diana's heart melted in a wave of immense pity for him, of sympathy, of deep affection. She paused, and, drawing the letter from her pocket, she added a post-script:

"I miss you more than I can say. No girl ever had a better friend. And I want to tell you that I am grateful to you for all your unflinching kindness to me, your sympathy and help. People often leave these things unsaid till it's too late. I don't want to be too late. D. W."

Mrs. Bruce-Napier was in, but not Mr., a maid said in reply to Diana's inquiry. The maid wore a quakerish gray costume, with wide turned-back white collar and cuffs, but her hair was untidy and apron not too clean. "Artistic, even to servant, who smells of onions though," Diana thought as she was invited into the hall and ushered into a drawing-room so shaded and dim after the white sunshine without that she could scarcely discern a figure reclining on a low couch, till a voice — Katherine's voice — ex-



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claimed, "Is that you, Diana? How glad I am to see you — you dear creature. I'm alone and *so triste*. I've sprained my ankle."

Eagerly Diana crossed the somewhat crowded room, deftly worming her way in and out of chairs and tables, and, stooping, gave her friend a hearty kiss, and without observing the recipient of which winced a little. It was only later that she discovered Katherine disliked heartiness in any form.

"You've sprained your ankle? I *am* sorry. How did you do it?"

"I fell. I was getting over a high stile. Maurice *will* go for walks full of stiles. He says if we only walk along roads we might as well be in town."

Diana laughed. "I rather sympathize with him. I have a partiality for them myself, and so has Tommie. But I want to look at you, Katherine. May I pull up the blind? I want to see your lovely hair."

"Well, only a little. I don't like a strong light." She spoke carelessly, but had blushed at the compliment. Diana was as direct as of old.

They sat and chatted for some time, and Diana found that her old friend had greatly changed, and in some respects not for the better. She was still warm-hearted, generous and affectionate,

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but her artistic pose had become tiresome and extreme.

She made many inquiries about the Poppleton family and household, but Diana was cautious and not to be drawn.

"I, of course, was delighted when I heard you were coming to Bogmere, but, oh, how I pitied you! I felt my having recommended such an engagement to you would always be on my conscience. Will you forgive me, Diana, dear?"

"I have my living to make," said Diana drily. "There can be no question of forgiveness. I am grateful to you."

"Really?" Katherine assumed incredulity. "But, I forget, we are so different. I, personally, would rather die than live with Mrs. Poppleton. But you are so brave, so practical, so sensible. I wish I had been born with a less sensitive disposition. Life, with its crudities, almost hurts me at times. To sit, for example, at the same table with Mrs. Poppleton would cause me actual physical pain, so powerfully would her materialism, her lack of *soul*, affect me."

Diana pushed her chair back from the couch and got up. She felt she wanted a window open, and without ceremony raised one a few inches. "I should have much more physical pain if I'd

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nothing to eat and drink," she said bluntly. And in her eyes was the little scornful look that wilted people up when they had roused her contempt. But Katherine did not see it, as her own eyes were closed. "And I should have the biggest pain of all if I couldn't face the unpleasantnesses of life gamely — " She glanced round the pretty room. "I'd much prefer sitting amongst soft green sofa cushions, reading a novel and allowing my delicate emotions and rose-leaf fancies to run riot; but some people have to face life's little ironies and bottle up their feelings, and clutch and hold down their sensitivenesses with firm hand, and say 'Kismet'."

"But I simply couldn't. I'm not so strong as you, Diana. Besides, I am not reading a novel," Katherine added literally. "It's Reginald Dope's Poetry. Perhaps you've not read him?"

"It's not a him, but a her," said Diana. "I tried the stuff once, but it sort of cloyed. I felt like a bee must feel when overladen with honey. So I sat on the Common in a wind and read a book of Jack London's and then I felt better. But tell me about your husband, Katherine. Don't let's discuss our emotions; men and matters are healthier. What's he like? I hoped to see him."

"He'll be in to tea; he's gone for a walk. He's

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over there on the mantel-shelf — his photo." She spoke without enthusiasm. She enjoyed discussing her own feelings and thoughts and views, and more especially now with a sprained ankle, and she objected to Diana's directness.

Diana studied the photograph thoughtfully. "I like it very much," she said after a time. "Isn't he awfully good tempered, and downright and honest?"

"Yes, I suppose so," Katherine yawned slightly. "He's the best fellow that ever lived, and simply devoted to me, but — he doesn't understand me a scrap. He's what might be described as elemental. Still, he's a dear."

Diana looked at her friend with knitted brows. "Another person material and without soul?" she began, but checked herself. Katherine was tiresome without a doubt, but she was possibly in pain. She looked frail and delicate, and was probably a good deal alone, and had become cap-tious and bored. Diana stooped and shook up her cushions and rearranged the silken coverlet over her knees.

"How long have you been here?" she asked gently.

"Nearly three weeks, and I'm so dull, and my ankle hurts horribly at times. And the doctor

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says it may be a couple of months before I'm about again. It was my own choice coming to live in the country, but this place is simply a hole. Nobody to know, at least nobody interesting, nobody with any mind and intelligence —— ” She might have gone on indefinitely with her woes had not her husband entered the room at this juncture.

Maurice Napier — he invariably forgot the Bruce, his second name, which had been tacked on to his surname with a hyphen since his marriage — was a man of medium height, clean-shaven, somewhat stout face, with blue eyes and a square chin.

He shook hands most cordially with Diana, glad that his wife had had a visitor and had not been alone. He had been most unwilling to go out, being still very much in love, but Katherine had driven him forth.

Diana liked the way in which he bent over the couch, kissed his wife, and looked at her with pride in his eyes. She noticed the gentleness of his hands and touch as he raised her to a more upright position to have her tea. This was the way Tommie looked after people and liked to take care of them.

The tea was nicely served. There was plenty

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of dainty silver and artistic china, but the tea itself was cold and the food sketchy. But Diana reflected that to housekeep first in a tiny village, and secondly when laid up, must be difficult. She noticed how Maurice tried to cover up gaps by fetching some sweet biscuits from the dining-room, with the remark that she must be hungry after her walk.

"The success of marriage depends quite to a small degree on food," she had once heard her mother observe in her wise way. "Men, on the whole, are more susceptible to their creature comforts than women, because they are often more tired. An overworked man doesn't want to come home to tough, stringy steak, uncooked onions, and one of the children strumming 'The Merry Peasant' in the next room. He doesn't feel merry himself and resents it in any one else, even in a fictitious peasant. But give that man a well-cooked meal, put two or three pennyworth of flowers on the table, in firm glasses that won't tumble over, keep quiet, and in an hour's time he'll be whistling the 'Merry Peasant' himself."

Diana glanced at Katherine. Would *she* be sensible? Would she assist her husband to sing the "Merry Peasant?" Would she know how to

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retain his deep affection? Or was she going to be a second Mrs. Poppleton?

That night she added a second postscript to her letter:

“Mission in life extending. Another husband and wife on my hands. This husband devoted. Wife somewhat vain and self-centred, but still affectionate. Must try and keep her so. D. W.

“Isn’t my self-importance colossal? But people with missions are always objectionable.”

## CHAPTER VIII

The days passed uneventfully. Bogmere, once so charming and quiet and unconventional, had become residential, and therefore more or less commonplace.

Diana spent each day the same as the last: In teaching, walking, sewing, and making an occasional call with Mrs. Poppleton on some of the less influential people of the place. Mrs. Poppleton called *alone* on the important and wealthy residents, in whose houses a nursery governess in any other capacity than that of a nursery governess would have been out of place.

Teaching, Diana found, was much more interesting than she had anticipated; indeed, it was even exciting at times. For while she taught Susie she was teaching herself, and the child being remarkably quick and intelligent, Diana had much ado to keep ahead.

Together they painted gorgeous maps of Great Britain, Russia, or the Island of Madagascar. Diana liked jumping about to various and separate



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places of the earth so that no part should become monotonous. She was of the belief that the best way to commit anything to memory was to see it down before one's eyes, see it illustrated; and Susie agreed with her. Lessons in such a form became a delight. While Diana depicted the towns of Scotland in vermillion red, Susie painted the rivers in Prussian blue — and exciting and dangerous rivers they were. The Forth would overflow its banks and swamp Edinburgh, and the Tay would rise with the rapidity of the Nile. And while Diana, with a clean brush, would make frantic efforts to rescue some city from complete inundation, Susie would calmly wipe out another with the devastating celerity of an earthquake.

Together they stuck in mountains in crimson lake. Susie had a partiality for high peaks, and Diana for long low ranges.

And as they learnt geography, so they taught themselves history. And what scenes they sketched! Susie was best at Alfred and the Cakes, and the cheeks of the woman who blew upon the cakes were as fat and round as inflated balloons. Whilst Diana had leanings toward Sir Walter Raleigh spreading his cloak, which she represented as crimson velvet edged with ermine; or

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of the Kingmaker with a thousand or so battle axes cleaving his skull.

Their progress might appear to have been slow, but in reality was remarkably quick. Their pictures they "threw off" with a few impressionist touches, and once a scene or incident was depicted it was never forgotten.

Reading, writing and arithmetic were attacked in the old conventional way. Diana could evolve no scheme toward assisting her pupil to remember that twelve went into a hundred eight times and four over. A knowledge of the Kindergarten system *might* have helped, but Diana wasn't sure of this. She had known two Kindergarten children, and they were both singularly backward for their years.

Sometimes Mrs. Poppleton came to the nursery and watched her governess and child at their lessons. At first she had been shocked at their method of procedure, but finding that Susie appeared to make progress, and had never been known to approach her lessons with greater zest, she decided not to interfere.

Her governess was certainly eccentric, and far too independent for a governess for Mrs. Poppleton's liking and approval, but she had a "way" with her with children and Susie adored her.

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Mrs. Poppleton, too, against her inclination and fixed rule, became interested in Diana, became interested in spite of herself. Up to now she had regarded governesses as a species distinct and apart from the rest of the human race. Persons who worked for the welfare of other persons' children, and when not working, ready, like the baker when he encountered the Snark, to fade away and efface themselves in a quiet and lady-like fashion.

And as to fade away was quite the last thing Diana would ever contemplate doing, Mrs. Poppleton, in the early stages of their acquaintance-ship, received many mental shocks.

For example, Diana actually took upon herself to prescribe for the treatment of Mrs. Poppleton's rheumatoid arthritis one day when that lady had been murmuring about her "affliction," as she always spoke of it.

"Try a good five miles' walk every day for a week," suggested Diana briskly. "Eat plenty of sugar, and live on everything the doctor says you shouldn't, and then see what happens."

Mrs. Poppleton gave a little sort of gasp, and regarded the girl with widely dilated pupils.

"Your suggestion, Miss Wenderby," she said, "which I might venture to point out was not

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invited, I regard as — as little short of — ”  
She apparently was wishful of using a polite word.  
Her governess might forget herself, but never  
Mrs. Poppleton.

“Madness,” Diana helped her out. “I know  
it must sound so to you, but there is method in  
it. Now how long have you suffered from this  
— rheumatism?” She used the word boldly.

“From this rheumatoid arthritis?” corrected  
her employer; “about five years, and each year it  
becomes worse. Sometimes I think — ”

But Diana interrupted her gently. She had  
been with the Poppletons a month, and during  
that month she had learnt exactly what Mrs.  
Poppleton thought of her own complaint, for she  
had obviously given it earnest thought and un-  
remitting study and attention.

“And you are no better. You have been under  
the doctor for five long years and you are no  
better. I don’t say it is his fault, I don’t say the  
treatment even is at fault, but I do say that under  
the circumstances it is worth trying another.  
Don’t you agree with me?”

“And what would you suggest?” Mrs. Pop-  
pleton was holding herself well in hand.

“As I say, a good walk each day. Careful  
dieting — eat everything that’s supposed to con-

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tain uric acid. You've been trying everything without; and don't avoid clay soils. You say you're no better *with* treatment, you might be better without."

"That will do," breathed Mrs. Poppleton. "I don't wish to hear any more. This conversation makes me feel really ill," and she got up and sailed out of the room, leaving Diana open-mouthed from astonishment. Diana, with all her quickness and perspicacity had failed to discover that Mrs. Poppleton's rheumatoid arthritis, which really caused her no pain or inconvenience, was one of her greatest sources of happiness.

The suppers in the evening tried Diana more than anything else in the day's work. Alone with Susie she was moderately happy. At times when out in the beautiful autumn weather, walking over the springy downs, with Susie clinging to her hand and looking up adoringly into her face, she was as happy as she could be away from her own home and people. But the suppers, when the little girl was tucked away into her bed and she and Mrs. Poppleton were alone, were almost insupportable. Mrs. Poppleton at the head of the table in a white pongee silk blouse with a wide tight, very tight, waistband, from which

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her bountiful figure swelled above and below; her hair dressed in elaborate rolls and curls carefully protected by a fringe net ill-matching in colour; her fingers and wrists covered with rings and bracelets, and her brow furrowed and wrinkled with anxiety and displeasure at the misdoings of Mercy, the house-parlourmaid, who was waiting at table.

Mercy, a nice, good girl, was not quick, and her memory was not a retentive one. She had been in Mrs. Poppleton's service for two months, she would possibly be in it for another two, then she would leave. No servant remained long with Mrs. Poppleton.

"Where is your waiter?" Mrs. Poppleton with unvarying monotony shot this question at Mercy three nights out of every six. "I have told you repeatedly that the carving knife and fork must be removed separately on a tray and *not* on the dish. Go and fetch it."

Mercy, wildly flurried, and with scarlet cheeks, asked what she was to do with the carvers whilst she fetched the waiter. She was clutching on to them as an Indian warrior clutches his scalping knife.

"Return them to the dish *pro tem*."

Mercy apparently believed that the dish "*pro*

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tem." was an article of china she had not yet met, for she searched hurriedly round the room.

"Put them back." Mrs. Poppleton's voice was so sudden and sharp that, in a fright, Mercy dropped them on to the dish with a clatter, liberally bespattering her mistress with gravy.

"The servants will send me mad," Mrs. Poppleton said, as she wiped a dab of gravy from her nose. "And you do nothing to help, Miss Wenderby. You just sit and look on while they — splash me."

"I am sorry," murmured Diana, as with an effort she strangled a laugh, "but I can hardly give instructions to the servants in your presence."

"Yes, you can — at least about the carvers; I give you permission. Perhaps between us we may some day induce Mercy to remove them correctly."

"But can it matter," asked Diana unguardedly, "so long as they leave the room somehow?"

Mrs. Poppleton eyed her governess more in pity than resentment.

"Perhaps not to some people. *You*, probably, have been unaccustomed to good waiting and having things done really properly." Mrs. Poppleton tempered her rudeness with a smile, which

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was again a concession to Diana. Hitherto she had not smiled when she had been rude to her governesses.

"I don't know," returned Diana, quite good-humouredly, "but I *do* know we took our meals in peace, and — had no accidents with the gravy," she added slyly. "There is some on your shoulder — no, your left one," she said kindly; "shall I wipe it for you?" For Mrs. Poppleton was making ineffectual attempts with her table napkin to remove the obnoxious mess.

"Thank you." Mrs. Poppleton didn't sound as grateful as she ought. She somehow felt that she was being laughed at, though Diana's face was as grave as a judge's.

The waiter episode or difficulty cropped up one Saturday night when Mr. Poppleton was present. He was in the midst of a glowing description of an exhibition of Corots he had seen during the week. His plain, rugged face was alight with enthusiasm; he talked well and convincingly. Diana, after a week of dull, vapid conversation, had given herself over to complete enjoyment of this new and refreshing subject, and was eagerly listening when Mrs. Poppleton began to skirmish with Mercy. At first it was conducted in whispers, and Mr. Poppleton, after a momentary



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pause, addressed himself solely to Diana. Her sympathetic attention soothed and gratified him, and her intelligence and responsiveness encouraged him to talk his best, when Mrs. Poppleton's whispers became louder and louder.

"You have *lost* the waiter?" she ejaculated to the trembling Mercy. "Impossible. A waiter is not a thing that one loses."

"What's the trouble?" Mr. Poppleton turned impatiently in his chair. "What's the matter now?"

"Mercy has lost the electro-plated waiter," said Mrs. Poppleton impressively, "and it was a wedding present. And we are waiting for the carvers to be removed."

"Well, take 'em away on the dish," said Mr. Poppleton innocently. "Women have no resources. Never heard such a fuss about nothing. Mercy, buck up and use your brains," and he returned to Diana and his theme, totally unaware that for the first time since Mercy had entered his household she publicly laughed, whilst his wife was too enraged even to speak as the dish and carvers jointly were borne from the room.

Diana looked forward to the week-ends and the arrival of Mr. Poppleton as eagerly as a traveller

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contemplates the meeting with a green oasis in the midst of a hot and arid desert.

By Thursday she began to flag—four days of Mrs. Poppleton undiluted would have quenched a braver spirit. Friday, she was in a moribund condition, though still smiling and making efforts at cheerfulness for the sake of Susie. Saturday, she took on a fresh lease of life, and by Sunday she was positively light-hearted and gay once more.

Her family knew nothing of the difficulties of her life. Her letters were bright and amusing. Only Tommie was aware of her heart-weariness, and he did what he could to comfort and cheer her on her way. He wrote to her with regularity—long, interesting letters, retailing the news of the village, the sayings and doings of her family, telling her of his own reading and work and long tramps taken alone. There were no words of love. Diana should have no scare or frights. She had said plainly that she would return his love if she could. He must make the best of that for the present. Never once did Tommie entirely abandon hope of winning her. He was extraordinarily patient and persevering in whatever he took up, whether it was work, play, or love-making. He had taken up Diana when he was a child and she

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a toddling mite. She had always attracted him. Her very naughtiness and the daring of her spirit had filled him with secret admiration. Her religious mania, followed by her running away from school, had stirred his own less adventurous spirit. She was wonderful, he told himself. She was worth fighting for.

When her letters came he held them to his heart and his lips, but he did not open them in the house. In his own heart and thoughts he always associated Diana with some creature of the woods, of the moors. She was an outdoor girl, not a sit-by-the-fire. To him it seemed she was born of the sun and the wind and the rain and the fine, pure air of heaven. So he took her letters forth to the sun and the wind and the rain, and he would tramp miles from the haunts of man, hugging the letter in his hand, feeling the paper, tasting, in anticipation, the delights he would find therein.

And then on some lovely headland, or obscure corner of some heathy common, he would break the seal, slowly, deliberately, as an epicure rolls in his mouth some longed-for delicacy, draw forth from the envelope the sheets of closely written paper, and with a sigh, half of pleasure, half of pain, give himself up to deciphering the illegibly scrawled but precious words.

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Diana wrote in a hurry, she wrote badly. There was a plentiful sprinkling of incorrectly spelt words and grammatical errors, but the letters themselves were a revelation of what a letter should be from one close friend to another. She wrote as she talked. She made no comments on the weather, because she never did in conversation. If it rained, it was so depressingly obvious, she said, that it was no good referring to it. Her description of her various and numerous altercations with Mrs. Poppleton reduced Tommie to a state of tearful weakness, and when *she* had been worsted in a fight she always admitted it with characteristic candour. She could be generous to an enemy.

In one letter, after she had been at Bogmere a couple of months, she wrote the following:

"I shall not be home for Christmas, though I've been clinging to the idea like the proverbial drowning man at a straw.

"I voiced my request this morning after breakfast, which consisted of brawn, made by Mrs. Poppleton's 'own hands.' When Mrs. Poppleton's been cooking, she refers to the results of her culinary efforts as 'orange marmalade, made by my own hands,' 'damson jam, made by my own hands,' 'red cabbage pickle, made by my own

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hands,' and invariably in a tone of surprise that her 'own hands' could achieve anything so remarkable. She alone is surprised. Her hands, large and strong, look capable of roasting an ox whole, or of pressing into shape a twenty-pound galantine of veal.

"After partaking of anything made by her own hands, she is curiously uplifted; and this morning seemed a favourable time to voice my request with the brawn still undigested.

"'You want to go home at Christmas?' she said, startled.

"I nodded in the affirmative.

"'But I give a whole fortnight's holiday in the summer. I mentioned that in my letter. A nursery governess is never granted more.' (I'm getting so tired of the words nursery governess.)

"'Don't you think she requires as much holiday as a governess who isn't nursery?' I asked.

"'No,' said she.

"'Why not?'

"'I ——' she began; then stopped. 'I—I object to being questioned by you, Miss Wenderby, as though you were a princess.' She began to walk from the room.

"'Stop!' I cried. 'It's because I'm *not* a princess that I have to question you. If I were a princess I should be living in a palace, not questioning, but ordering people about. It's only people in subservient positions who should have the monopoly of asking questions. I am sure

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you will see my point. Please tell me why you think a governess who has charge of a child twelve hours a day should require less holiday than a governess who has charge of a child six hours a day?’

“This sounded, even to me, so like a proportion sum that I was offering to Mrs. Poppleton for her elucidation that I was in no way surprised when she really walked out of the room — her invariable custom when difficult problems are presented to her.

“She walked out of the room, closing the door firmly behind her, and leaving me with my well-arranged arguments trembling on my lips.

“I would so much rather march out of a room than be left in it while another person marches — wouldn’t you? I just stamped round for a minute or two, and then Mrs. Poppleton returned and asked me if I were suffering from toothache. And when I replied, ‘No,’ said she, ‘Why, then are you wearing holes in our Persian carpets?’

“‘Look here, Mrs. Poppleton,’ I said, ‘I will give up all idea of a holiday at Christmas if you will agree to my going home at Easter. I could not wait till next July or August. It would be impossible. I must see my parents before then.’

“She wavered.

“‘Don’t you think that Susie, when she grows up, would fret a little if separated from you for twelve months?’

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"She capitulated, and actually her lips trembled as she said: 'Very well, I agree to what you ask,' and then added, 'but I only hope my child will never be in a similar position to yours.'

"And when I could not resist saying, 'Oh, the place is not so bad as that, Mrs. Poppleton,' she just looked at me, and again walked out of the room. But this time I did not mind being left behind the closed door, for I had gained a point. Easter is a long way off, but not quite so long as August, and it falls early. I've looked it up, and the moon rises with extreme despatch after the twenty-first of March.

"Last evening Mrs. Poppleton became expansive in a direction totally unexpected. It was after supper. I have a cold, the rooms are kept so overheated, and the minute we go into the cold passages we begin to sneeze. First Mrs. Poppleton has a cold, then I have, then Susie. One of us always has a red nose and is sniffing. It's my turn just now. Mrs. Poppleton observed that I looked poorly, and suggested that I should put away my work. I did so with alacrity, and was about to start on the new 'Gissing' you sent me — and thank you so much, it's most appropriate, for I'm one of the 'Odd Women' now — when Mrs. Poppleton said quite pleasantly, 'Don't read, Miss Wenderby; let's have a chat,' and as we do nothing else but chat — she chats and I listen — I reluctantly put the book down. 'Have a good toast,' she suggested, 'and put your feet on the

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fender on this newspaper and then you won't scratch it.'

"Have you ever sat with your feet on a fender with a newspaper between, Tommie? It's so uncomfortable. You daren't move your feet for fear the paper will slip. But I didn't like to be impolite, or appear ungrateful, so there I sat rigid and with scorched legs while Mrs. Poppleton told me of her love affairs.

"She has had two, remarkable to relate. It's extraordinary what some men fancy. I have seen photographs of her taken as a girl, and I must admit she was good-looking in a large, fine, fresh way. She says her complexion was like rose leaves, and that when Mr. Poppleton first met her she was walking through a meadow in the early morning, and was wearing a white gown with a blue ribbon at her waist. Mr. Poppleton, then aged twenty-three, was sketching in the neighbourhood — her people lived in Warwickshire, and do still. He was in rooms, and was so attracted by her appearance that he succeeded in getting an introduction to her, and a month later they were engaged. It appears they did a great deal of sketching together, he instructing and helping her. This, of course, was a dangerous game when the man was an artist and twenty-three years of age, and the girl wore a white gown with a blue ribbon at her waist, and the time of the year was Spring, and the apple trees were in blossom, and the girl's parents were wealthy and



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had three other daughters whom they desired to see married.

"But then — there was always Mrs. Poppleton's mind. How did Mr. Poppleton, who was intelligent, get over that? I wonder and wonder and can find no solution. Perhaps in those days it was a different order of mind. Minds must progress, I suppose, or go back — shrink, in fact. When I contemplate Mrs. Poppleton's mind, I am reminded of a woollen garment that has been boiled.

"You will say I am hard on her — you, who are always so kind, so anxious to see the best in people. But you have not sat with your feet on a newspaper, and a bad cold in your head, and listened to Mrs. Poppleton's *talk* for two hours on end.

"From her other and first offer of marriage I gained, however, some amusement. Mrs. Poppleton was unconsciously funny on the subject. It was from a German baron, and as Mrs. Poppleton knew as little of his language as he apparently did of hers, the courtship must have been attended with difficulty.

"‘He was rich,’ said Mrs. Poppleton, ‘fabulously rich.’

"‘Why then did you not marry him?’ said I.

"‘His hair had a startled appearance,’ said she; ‘stood up on end like a blacking brush, and his dress was strange.’

"‘In what way?’ said I, becoming interested.

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"'He wore a dress suit at unsuitable moments with brown boots and a check tie,' said she reminiscently.

"'A German man's breadth of view and unorthodoxy with regard to his clothes is a sign of his greatness and the greatness of his nation,' said I, without having any knowledge of the subject.

"'Is it?' said she. 'I don't like Germans as a class.'

"'And they return the compliment,' said I. 'I think to have gained the affection of a German baron, whatever his hair, was nothing short of a triumph for you. And you would have made an excellent German wife — I mean wife to a German,' I corrected myself.

"'Do you think so?' said she, looking pleased.

"'If you made brawn for him, such as we had for breakfast this morning, he would have fought duels on your behalf had the occasion arisen for them,' said I, preparing to rise, and folding up the paper that had been beneath my feet.

"She looked still more pleased; and when she bade me good night, she 'trusted' my cold would be better in the morning.

"I am writing this in my bedroom. It is cold and cheerless and the hour is late. But it is impossible to write letters if Mrs. Poppleton is about. She says: 'I am so sorry to interrupt you,' or 'can you give me a moment, Miss Wenderby?' or 'Please excuse me,' so I do my correspond-

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ence up here; and I am always afraid she may pounce in upon me and object to the extravagance of two candles burning till late in the night.

"Drusilla, from whom I heard this morning, sounds happy. She is fond of women and girls, you know. And the principal of the school is kind to her. Besides, she goes home most week-ends. I could be happy under such conditions. But, there, I'm grumbling again—and I'm a weak, knock-kneed creature. Do you know these lines of R. L. S: 'The day returns and brings us the petty round of irritating concerns and duties. Help us to play the man, help us to perform them with laughter and kind faces, let cheerfulness abound with industry. Give us to go blithely on our business all this day, bring us to our resting beds weary and content and undishonoured, and grant us in the end the gift of sleep.'

"I've copied them out and pinned them over my mantel-shelf. I read them each morning and say to myself sternly, "Now, Diana Wenderby, you're to play the man to-day. You're to perform all your duties with laughter and a kind face, and you're to let cheerfulness abound with industry.' Then I go downstairs and I'm ready for a row with Mrs. Poppleton before I've finished my first cup of coffee.

"Tommie, why are some of us born with such a strong bias toward evil?

"One portion of Stevenson's prayer is always answered. 'And grant us in the end the gift

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of sleep.' Sleep descends upon me as I lay my head on the pillow. It is descending upon me now.

"Diana bids you good night."

Tommie's face was soft and tender as he read the closing words. He had seen Diana asleep, and she had looked like a little child.

## CHAPTER IX

About a month before Christmas the Poppleton household was thrown into a state of excitement on receipt of a letter from Mr. Poppleton's brother announcing his intention of coming to stay with them at Bogmere, if convenient, for an indefinite period.

Hugh Poppleton was a captain in a Bengal cavalry regiment, and would be home on leave for a year. Part of this time he therefore proposed to spend with his brother, of whom he was very fond, and whom he had not seen for some years.

Mr. Poppleton was unfeignedly delighted. The letter arrived on a Saturday afternoon when he was at home. Mrs. Poppleton received the news in silence, and her face looked troubled.

Her husband, discovering that something was amiss, asked her what was the matter. She was always depressed, he told himself with irritation when other people were happy.

She said: "I don't think this is a suitable household for your brother Hugh to visit."

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"Why not?" Mr. Poppleton asked in surprise.

"We are too homely. A regiment in the Bengal cavalry is smart, your brother will be smart. We are not smart. Your brother won't be happy."

"Fiddlesticks!" shouted Mr. Poppleton. Diana and Susie were not present.

Mrs. Poppleton drew down the corners of her mouth. No woman likes to be shouted "fiddlesticks" at. It hurts her pride.

"Hugh is the nicest and simplest chap alive. You don't know him, Laura. On his last leave, you will remember, you were away with Susie at Felixstowe when he came down to Bogmere. The one before he never came home at all, but spent his time in travelling in Italy and France. You've seen him, but you don't know him or you wouldn't make such an observation. What Hugh wants is, I expect, a bit of home life. He'll be here for Christmas — why, he'll be here next week, by jove!" he said referring to the letter. "Just you turn him on to some spiced beef, Laura, and then see if he wants smartness or silly rot of that description." It was long since Mr. Poppleton had been so carried away. A man about the house! A man to have a pipe with, a man to have a drink with! Already Mr. Pop-

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pleton saw himself and his brother yarning away till the small hours of the morning. He rubbed his hands with glee, and shouted to Susie and Diana to come down and hear the news.

"Uncle Hugh is the beautiful man with a long moustache in the drawing-room?" asked Susie.

"That's him," replied her father ungrammatically.

"Another Christmas present to give," Susie sighed. "I shall work him a stamp case. But I'm glad he's coming. We shall be enough then to play 'Happy Family.' Mother won't play."

"Mother hasn't time," said Mrs. Poppleton ponderously. "Mother has a great deal to think about, and will have still more now Uncle Hugh is coming." Spiced beef, extra plum pudding, extra mincemeat, extra large turkey, the garnishing and cleaning of the best spare room occupied her thoughts — everything else for the moment was crowded out. And she must have a new dress. Hugh Poppleton would be accustomed to dressing every night for dinner. Supper must be altered to dinner. It would mean extra expense, extra trouble. The servants would probably give notice. But it must be gone through *somehow*. And there was Diana. Would it be advisable to have a nursery governess in to dinner?

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Supper was different. A supper of cold boiled pork and pickled cabbage was a suitable meal for governesses to attend. But dinner, with a soup and fish course, and dessert at the end, and herself in a low dress, was unsuitable. Yet, somehow, she felt Diana would make the meal "go." Perhaps, after all — but she could defer her decision about the matter until later. Hugh would not be here for a week. There was plenty of time and she could consult her husband about it.

And when she did, a week later, Mr. Poppleton said rude things. He had no intention of being rude, he never did mean to be rude to his wife, but she drove him to it, he told himself, to save his conscience. To start with, he failed to see why she should have dinner at all. If Hugh objected to supper he could leave. Nobody would compel him to remain at Bogmere a moment longer than he desired. But he wouldn't object. Hugh was the easiest chap in the world to get on with and to cater for. Give him a dinner of herbs and he would be satisfied. Mr. Poppleton had no grounds, by the way, for making this assertion, his knowledge of his brother's likes and dislikes being limited. They had not lived together for years. But had he known that Hugh would insist upon a diet consisting exclusively of potted



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lampreys and fried sturgeon's roe, he would have kept silent on the subject. His wife's obvious anxiety to do the right thing by her prospective visitor filled Mr. Poppleton with dread that through her fussiness his brother would be made to feel he was not welcome. And sooner than that should happen he would prefer losing his right hand. He himself was the very soul of hospitality. He had a knack of making people feel at home at once. The very way in which he handed cigars and whisky to his friends was a revelation of how cigars and whisky should be handed. He now felt really distressed at the thought of what his wife might say and do.

"I should certainly stick to supper," he repeated for the third time, whilst he fidgeted about the room.

"No, Chris," said Mrs. Poppleton, "it is out of the question. We must dine late while your brother is here." She spoke with a sort of heroic fortitude which maddened her husband to the point of distraction. "That I have quite settled. The three first menus are already arranged. I have given them earnest thought, and have already ordered *soufflé* cases."

"Those don't sound sustaining." Mr. Poppleton shouldn't have said this, and he knew

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he shouldn't. It was exasperating. But Mrs. Poppleton kept her temper. She was upheld by a spirit of burning sacrifice which precedes self-martyrdom.

"And Miss Wenderby is my difficulty."

"In what respect?"

"Whether she should dine with us or not. Or take her supper in the nursery."

Mr. Poppleton picked an ornament up from the mantel-piece and brought it down again with a bang, causing Mrs. Poppleton to give a high jump.

"What *are* you doing?" she asked, amazed and breathless.

"Laura," said Mr. Poppleton, with a suppressed groan, "don't, don't talk like that, old girl. Here we've made Miss Wenderby one of the family, one of ourselves, for between three and four months. She's worked like a nigger. Always jolly, always cheerful. Thrown in her lot with ours, interested in our doings — or pretends to be. Goodness itself to the little nipper, who has the sense to worship her in return, and — you talk of banishing her to the nursery because you propose turning supper into a deuced uncomfortable dinner and making everybody miserable. Laura — don't go. I — I'm s —"

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But Mr. Poppleton was not called upon to tell the lie, to say he was sorry. For Mrs. Poppleton had gone. Following her usual custom when her husband lost his temper, she had risen, walked with slow, dignified carriage to the door, opened it, and shut it softly but securely, and left Mr. Poppleton to rage.

Diana, coming in a few minutes later, found him in a chair, leaning against a table, his head buried in his arms. His attitude was one of despair. He did not hear her and softly she withdrew, pity in her heart.

Another Saturday had come round, further bickerings and quarrellings to face, further misunderstandings to arise and to be made up. Mr. Poppleton had not been in the house an hour. He had entered it in good spirits and filled with good resolves to maintain peace with his wife at any price. All the week he had been telling himself that he was impatient with her, that he had lost the power to bring out the best in her, that the fault lay with himself. And here, at the end of the first hour, he was left alone behind the closed door with despair in his heart, while she in another part of the house was filled with a righteous indignation and waiting for him to come and humble himself at her feet.

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Why didn't he end it? he asked himself over and over again. His love for her was dead. To live as they did surely was wicked. Matrimony was a holy estate—a beautiful and glorious estate for those who loved one another. But to live as they did! Mr. Poppleton suddenly felt his soul revolt from it, from the sordidness of it, from the misery of it. But what could he do? What was there to do? Nothing. He could not leave his wife, could not separate from her. Other men might do such things, but not he, because he knew that she still loved him. That was the tragedy of it all. If only she did not love him he would end their relationship. Some arrangement could be arrived at about Susie. She could go to school. She could spend her holidays alternately with her parents. It would be sad, distressing, bad for the child, but such a life as this was worse. Yet he could do nothing—just because his wife still had an affection for him; nay, more, loved him as much as her poor narrow soul was capable of loving. He wished that she didn't. He wondered that she did. He even found himself thinking that it was fine of her to do so. By rights she ought to hate him. He was often irritable with her, often harsh, frequently impatient, as he had been just now. She was

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anxious to do her best by his brother Hugh, give him a royal time, and all he did was to lose his temper with her. The remembrance of her attitude toward Diana he thrust from him. Some of the finest women were small about the social amenities of life. They meant no harm, no unkindness. It was constitutional with them. They couldn't help it.

Poor Mr. Poppleton had now arrived at the stage when he went in search of his wife to make friends with her. He didn't look very hard, but he found her.

He found her in the spare room. She was trying to decide where an armchair, already brought up in readiness for Hugh's comfort, should stand — in the window, or by the fireplace? She received his overtures of friendship a little coldly — partly, perhaps, because she was so torn with indecision as to the destiny of the armchair, but chiefly because his praise of Diana had been so exaggerated and warm. Miss Wenderby, Mrs. Poppleton had allowed herself to like, and she was a nice enough girl in her way, but for her husband to make all this fuss about her was absurd. She, Mrs. Poppleton, would invite Miss Wenderby in to dinner with her and Hugh if she felt so disposed when the time came,

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but she refused to be coerced into it by her husband, even if he banged the ornaments about.

She allowed him, however, to kiss her on the forehead. She even felt pleased that he did so, but she did not allow him to see her pleasure. Men always thought they could rampage around and fly into tempers with their wives, and then when they had cooled down and were ready to make it up, expected their wives to fall into their arms with gratitude. Mrs. Poppleton was not of the falling, grateful sort, which, taking everything into consideration, was one of the few bits of luck that fell Mr. Poppleton's way — Mrs. Poppleton being five feet eight inches in height, and, as she invariably referred to herself, with a pride which was difficult to understand, an O.S.

The evening had arrived — the evening upon which Captain Hugh Poppleton was expected. And an excitement which could scarcely be described as pleasurable pervaded the household of his brother, Christopher Poppleton.

Cook had just given notice. Mercy was weeping in the pantry, why, cook was unable to fathom. Mercy's work was simple, handing plates and pouring out wine, compared with what *she* had to do.

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Mrs. Poppleton was in her bedroom dressing, Mr. Poppleton was in his dressing-room swearing — his white tie wouldn't tie — which didn't really matter, as later he found his wife wished him welcome his brother in a black tie and dinner coat. Diana in a soft gray silk gown, plainly made and only slightly low at the neck, and which she felt Mrs. Poppleton would consider eminently suitable for a governess who was nursery, was assisting Susie to get into a highly starched white frock with a blue sash and blue ribbons in her hair. Susie was to be allowed to sit up till dinner was served in order to see and welcome her new uncle.

Now they were all assembled in the dining-room, and Mrs. Poppleton had just made the alarming discovery that her husband was in felt slippers and hadn't brushed his hair. Mr. Poppleton really lost his temper this time. For hours he had been chivied about from pillar to post. He began to wish his brother had remained in India. He refused point-blank to change his slippers or touch his hair — not even for the King of England would he put himself to any more inconvenience. All he prayed and insisted upon was to be left in peace. He flung himself into an armchair and gloomily studied

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an evening paper — that it was the financial column upside down made no difference to him. Angrily he bit at his ragged moustache.

Mrs. Poppleton, cold, dignified, bitterly outraged at sight of the felt slippers on her husband's feet, was about to pass out of the room, closing the door firmly behind her, when there was a sound of wheels on the road outside, a vehicle drew up, there was a ring at the front door bell — Captain Hugh Poppleton had arrived.

Diana remained in the drawing-room while Mr. and Mrs. Poppleton and Susie welcomed their visitor in the hall. She felt that she was there on sufferance; she had gathered that had Mrs. Poppleton had her own way she would, for this evening at any rate, have been banished to the nursery, and she herself would have preferred it. For once her good temper and sense of humour had forsaken her. Her pride was up in arms. That this Poppleton woman with her small mind and petty narrow convention and little meanesses should look down upon and treat with a kindly patronage her — Diana Wenderby — was insupportable; and it was a very haughty inclination of her head she vouchsafed to Captain Poppleton on their introduction being made by Mrs. Poppleton before going in to dinner; and Mrs.



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Poppleton had presented her to him — perhaps it was from ignorance; Diana was generous enough to hope so.

Captain Poppleton must be described. In his own way he was a striking looking man, and a typical soldier. Tall, fair, with a blond moustache and blue eyes, most men looked at him twice and women a third time. But it was his manner that was the real attraction to those who knew him. Always gay, happy and careless, he passed through life smiling and contented, with a shrug of his shoulders and snap of his fingers for life's little ironies giving them the go-by with a characteristic abandonment, and welcoming all the good things of this world with open-armed enjoyment.

He now welcomed the fact that in his brother's household, which, half an hour ago on a reintroduction to his sister-in-law he feared might prove dull, was a girl, young and decidedly attractive, and across his plate of tomato soup he regarded her with eyes of respectful admiration. That was Hugh Poppleton's way, he so frankly and generously admired attractive people whether they were men or women — hence his popularity. For he was very popular — even Mrs. Poppleton admitted his charm, and had borne with equa-

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nimity the mess he had made in her neat hall with carelessly flung down travelling rugs, gun cases, golf clubs, papers and sixpenny books.

He not only looked at Diana with admiration, but he felt really grateful to her for being one of the Poppleton household. He was aware that his brother spent the greater part of the week in town, and but for this girl he would have had to face Mrs. Poppleton's heavy, playful pleasantries unrelieved. With one glance of his lazy blue eyes he saw that Diana was original before she was anything else; and freshness and originality of mind appealed to his senses, jaded by the flattering attentions of the smart, slangy, gamey girl of Anglo-Indian society, more than did mere outward beauty of face and form.

Besides, Diana looked curiously beautiful to-night, with her contradictory scornful eyes and pathetically tender curling lips and white cheeks, and smooth, dark, exquisitely poised head. He found himself wondering which of the two — the hard, scornful eyes or tender mouth was the indicator of her character. Later he knew, when Susie, who by her earnest request had been allowed to sit up for dinner "just for once," hurt herself in a wild game of hunt the slipper (suggested by this delightful Uncle Hugh), and he watched Diana

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kiss the little bruised knee and wipe away the tears, and comfort the child with soothing words.

The dinner had passed off well. Mercy, at the last moment, had pulled herself together, wiped her eyes on the roller towel and had not forgotten the waiter. All this had been through Diana's instigation and encouragement. Unknown to Mrs. Poppleton, Diana had descended to the pantry when Susie was dressed to try and cheer poor Mercy up, and had succeeded beyond her wildest hopes.

"I *was* going to give notice, Miss," said Mercy with a catch at her breath.

"Well, I shouldn't to-night," said Diana soothingly. "Cook has, you know."

"Yes, and I don't wonder. The mistress has been at her all day, and told her not to burn and overcook the meat a dozen times. Just as though cook had never met a sirloin of beef before."

"This is perhaps an extra special thing in sirloins," suggested Diana, "and Mrs. Poppleton is anxious to have everything very nice. Captain Poppleton has not been here for years — he — he lives in India, you know."

"Yes, and probably lives on human beings," said Mercy, scathingly. "I've heard they're what you call cannibals in them foreign parts."

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She mixed some fresh mustard in a pot with violence.

"Oh — no," said Diana, shocked. "He doesn't do that Mercy. India — is one of our possessions."

Mercy, quite unmoved by this information, proceeded to polish up tumblers and silver, and collect salt-cellar and wine glasses from various cupboards. At any rate she meant to lay the dinner table, and, relieved, Diana left her.

Captain Poppleton noticed that his sister-in-law did the carving after sharpening the knife with masterly hand. Mr. Poppleton carved uneconomically, was inclined to give undercut to the governesses instead of a slice off the end of the joint which was curled up with a skewer, and keep gristly bits for himself, which was a reversal of the correct order of things; so Mrs. Poppleton carved.

She was, for her, in quite good spirits. The dinner was going well, her husband's slippers, hidden beneath the table, were forgotten, her own new dress was a success, though a little tight and uncomfortable when she wielded the carving-knife. Susie, with flushed cheeks, looked bonnie and well; Diana, in her quiet gown, and in this silent, well-behaved mood, was a credit to

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any household who employed a governess; and, with a swift glance, Mrs. Poppleton discovered that the electro-plated waiter was on the side-board in readiness to bear away the carvers at the psychological moment.

Hugh Poppleton was a good conversationalist, and he entertained the table with stories of his life in India and adventures experienced whilst on his travels. Mrs. Poppleton, who usually disliked sustained conversation in any form, especially if in the character of an argument, became interested when she could snatch a moment from watching and directing Mercy's movements. Mr. Poppleton was absolutely happy, and Diana gradually unbent. Captain Poppleton's friendliness was difficult to resist, his glance was so frequently in Diana's direction, his desire to draw her into the conversation so apparent. It was foolish, perhaps, after all, she told herself, to be seriously affected by the treatment of such a woman as Mrs. Poppleton. Up to now she had succeeded in laughing at her snobbishness and little rudenesses, to see the humour, sad though it was, in her attitude toward all people she considered beneath herself in a social position. With a little, and quite unconscious, shake of her shoulders Diana cast Mrs.

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Poppleton from her. She would enjoy herself whilst she could. Opportunities of hearing about big game shoots or encounters with snakes did not often come her way in the Poppleton household; she might as well make the most of them. Tommie always said she was a good listener — a rare thing amongst women. Many women listen with superficial interest, with a desire to please the speaker, whilst busy collecting their own thoughts for what they themselves are going to say when they get the opportunity. Diana listened because she couldn't help it. She was sorry when the meal was over. Her interest was not lost upon Hugh Poppleton, and he was pleased and flattered. Nothing that she had said or done during the dinner had escaped his attention. He had surprised the look of amusement in her eyes when Mercy about to hand the sugar to Mr. Poppleton had suddenly whisked it away from him at a signal from Mrs. Poppleton, while she fetched the article which caused her such endless worry and trouble. And he saw that she silently laughed when Mr. Poppleton surreptitiously with his plate covered up some wine he had spilt on the clean tablecloth before Mrs. Poppleton discovered it.

“Who is this girl — this Miss Wenderby?”

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he inquired, when, later, Diana disappeared with Susie and did not again return.

He put the question to his brother when they were alone over a cigar, and he thought it more prudent to put it when his sister-in-law was out of the room. He divined that she would resent any interest being taken in her governess.

Mr. Poppleton told him as much as he knew of Diana's history, "and she's the best girl we've had," he concluded. "We've had dozens of 'em since Susie finished with a nurse. Always been something wrong — my wife's very particular, you know. Not that she shouldn't be," he added with generous loyalty to the absent Mrs. Poppleton; "can't be too careful at Susie's age to have somebody really nice."

"And this girl suits?"

"She's a brick," said Mr. Poppleton with enthusiasm. "The house has been a different place since she came into it. Susie is devoted to her, and my wife even likes her." (Mr. Poppleton was unaware that he had used the word "even.") "My one fear is that she won't stop with us."

"Why?" Captain Poppleton knocked the ash from his cigar with care.

"Too dull. She's plenty of spirit. This is

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her first situation. She ought to be doing something better with her brains."

"But if she's happy ——?"

"That's just it. Is she?" Mr. Poppleton puffed at his pipe thoughtfully. There was silence for a time. "You see it's a pretty quiet ménage — I'm away all the week; I can work better in town, you know."

"I expect you can." Captain Poppleton's eyes were on the ceiling. A ceiling is frequently useful to people in difficulties.

"So, of course, it must be slow here. My wife does no entertaining in my absence — saves all the parties for Saturdays and I only wish she wouldn't."

His brother laughed at the feeling in his voice.

"So it's not exciting for the governess. It wouldn't matter for some girls, but Miss Wenderby ——"

"I've seen her," interposed Captain Poppleton quietly.

"Exactly, so I needn't explain. Hugh, I'm jolly glad you've come. You'll liven things up a bit. You'll be nice to her? I want the girl to stop. I'm sick of changes, infernally sick. And I like the idea of her being with the little one — influence and all that sort of thing. She's quick



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tempered, and she's not particularly humble or patient, or the type one expects one's nursery governess ought to be — according to my wife. But she's fine at bottom, of that I'm convinced."

"I am sure she is," agreed Captain Poppleton, "and I'll do what I can to make things pleasant for her."

If only Mrs. Poppleton could have heard them as she descended the stairs after hearing "her birdie's" prayers (who earnestly desired to say them to Diana) and seen the expression of her brother-in-law's face as he gave vent to such a noble resolve, she would of a certainty have had a fit — what sort of a fit, it is difficult off-hand to predict. It might have been a fit of temper at her husband's absurd and ridiculous attitude of quixotism toward his governess, or a fit of crying (as she was tired after the strain of the dinner) at his general stupidity and aggravating ways, for it *was* stupidity to suggest that his very attractive brother should go and make himself nice to a dependent in the house—intense stupidity. Only a fool would have suggested it. Why, the girl would at once go and lose her head after the manner of girls who receive attention from dashing cavalry officers! There would be no doing anything with her. She would be more

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airified than ever and have to leave. Mrs. Poppleton would have thought all this and a great deal more, had she heard. But fortunately for Mr. Poppleton's peace of mind, and he was very peaceful and contented at the moment, she did not hear. Mr. Poppleton had his streaks of luck at times.

## CHAPTER X

The days passed swiftly now, so swiftly that Diana found herself wondering why or when she'd had time in the past to be bored. Tommie could have told her why, and might have added drily, "You ought to know yourself, you're usually pretty sharp. You were bored before because you'd nothing of any particular interest to absorb your attention. Now you have — in the form of Captain Poppleton — damn the man!"

But Tommie didn't say this. He was too proud and he was too kind. Diana had always taken her joys and sorrows to him and he had never failed her in sympathy. Of late her troubles had been paramount. Suddenly they ceased. Now Captain Poppleton was presented to him. She spoke of him carelessly, she spoke of him lightly — a reference here to a walk they had been, accompanied by Susie, a remark there about a conversation they had had. She spoke of him frankly too. She made "no bones" about his attractiveness. She mentioned his gaiety,

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his handsome person, his engaging qualities. She wrote of him in fact as she would of a brother. But none of it deceived Tommie — if she meant to deceive him, which is doubtful. He could read Diana as he could a book. He knew that a crisis had arisen in her life, or would soon arise; which way it would go it was impossible to predict; he did not know Captain Poppleton. Tommie was very depressed these days.

Hugh Poppleton had needed no encouragement from his brother "to make himself nice to Diana"; he had been immensely attracted toward her, if not exactly in love with her, that first evening of their acquaintance. Perhaps he had come ripe for an affair of the heart. He was unfeignedly delighted to be back in the Old Country once more. He was in excellent health and spirits, his position as regards money was sound, for an uncle, lately deceased, had left this his favourite nephew a comfortable annuity, and he had nothing to do. A dangerous position to be in when a man is still young and thrown cheek by jowl into the society of a dull sister-in-law and a girl such as Diana. It seems safe to say: "things may happen."

And what of Diana? Was her interest in Captain Hugh Poppleton genuine or superficial?

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A couple of weeks after his arrival she might have been found in her bedroom one evening thoughtfully regarding two frocks which lay on the bed — remnants of her days of prosperity. One was the quiet gray, which suited her moderately she thought; the other was a creamy net, quite simple, quite suitable for to-night and — she remembered what Tommie had said the first time he had seen her in it, and her cheeks flushed. For a moment she hesitated. Then resolutely she hung the net away in the wardrobe. Crossing the room a little later, she stood and looked at herself in the mirror, with a funny, comical, half-amused, half-scornful expression on her face. "Diana Wenderby," she said, "aren't you ashamed of yourself? You were putting on that cream net to attract Captain Poppleton. You are just the same as other girls, no better, no stronger. A little preening, a little burnishing of the feathers, and the man is caught. And you thought yourself superior." Almost with violence she strained back her hair unattractively from her face, and without another glance at herself walked firmly down the stairs.

Romance indeed was hot on the heels of Diana Wenderby and Captain Hugh Poppleton.

She went to the drawing-room. There was a

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fire in that room now each day. Mrs. Poppleton did not like to ask her brother-in-law to sit in any room but a drawing-room, as there was no library; a library, Mrs. Poppleton thought, was the correct place in which a cavalry officer should sit. Why, she couldn't have explained; she just had feelings that way.

Diana found Captain Poppleton alone. Susie was in bed. Mrs. Poppleton had not yet appeared.

He jumped up and pushed an armchair to the fire for her, welcoming her with his eyes.

"No, thank you," she said, seating herself on a carved black milking-stool, uncomfortable and hard.

"Why not have an easier chair?"

"Prefer this, thanks."

"That I don't believe. My sister-in-law ——"

"I don't think we should discuss her," flashed Diana. She was in a contrary, difficult mood.

"All right, all right," he laughed, "don't get excited. I was trying to suggest my sister-in-law might want the chair."

"No, you weren't. You were going to say that she would object to *my* sitting in it."

"Perhaps."

"Well, you shouldn't."

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"We do lots of things we shouldn't." He lolled back in his chair and regarded her with amused eyes.

"You have tried to discuss Mrs. Poppleton with me more than once."

"Well, is that any crime? I want to hear your opinion of her. It would interest me."

"If you once heard my opinion, my true opinion of her, I should have to leave," said Diana, "and it's not fair."

"Don't you want to leave?" His gaze searched her, but she met it unflinchingly. "I have my living to make," she said.

"Surely there must be some one who would be willing and anxious to make it for you?" His tone was full of meaning.

"I do not think you have known me long enough, Captain Poppleton, to put so intimate a question to me," she returned haughtily. "Let us change the conversation, please."

"I am sorry," he said penitently. "Please forgive me. I have known you only one fortnight, I am aware, but do you know some people one can learn to understand better in that short time than others in a lifetime."

"I was unaware I was so transparent."

"Call it honest," he corrected. "And re-

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member we've been many walks, and had many talks."

"You mean *you* have talked," she said, "and I have listened."

"Very well. Put it that way if you like. And I am ready to admit it. I *have* talked. I have never talked so much in my life. There has been so much to say, and I like talking."

She laughed at the admission. He was very boyish at times.

"I hope it hasn't bored you?"

"Not all of it."

Now *he* laughed.

"I am going to stay another two months, so I shall have further opportunities."

"Whatever does Mrs. Poppleton ——" Diana stopped.

"Whatever does my sister-in-law say?" his blue eyes twinkled. "She's bearing it better than I expected. I broke it to her to-day. I said I hoped it was not encroaching upon her hospitality too much, but that my cousin William could not take me in till the middle of February, as he was full up till then. I went on to say that I could not face hotel life, and that after my bachelor existence in India a domestic environment was so charming and delightful."



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"What did she say?" Diana leant forward in her interest. She had forgotten she was not going to discuss Mrs. Poppleton.

"She closed her eyes for a moment. Then she pulled herself together and she said, 'You are welcome, Hugh; any relation of my husband is welcome.' She said it as though she were taking a pill. Then she added, 'But do you object to dinner at night being changed into supper?' 'Changed into supper?' I echoed. 'How do you mean, Laura?' Said she, 'Till you came Miss Wenderby and I always had supper at night with just something with it.' I felt cheered at that information, because I shouldn't have liked supper without 'something.' Sounds cheerless to just sit down to knives and forks and glasses."

"You know what she meant," said Diana, refusing to laugh. "Go on."

"I said that I loved supper. That I was grieved to find she had made any alterations in her domestic arrangements for my sake. That such knowledge troubled me greatly. She replied that it didn't really matter, only that both the servants had given notice."

"She didn't tell you that?" ejaculated Diana.

"She did. Imagine my tender feelings."

"Don't tell Mr. Poppleton." Diana was really

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distressed. "It would so worry him. You shouldn't have told me, and I shouldn't have listened. How foolish she is and — how sad." Her face had become overcast. It seemed mean to talk like this behind her employer's back with Captain Poppleton. Yet it was a relief. Mrs. Poppleton had been unusually trying the last few days, and had been really disagreeable and unkind to the girl more than once. And Diana knew why. Mrs. Poppleton resented most strongly her brother-in-law's attention to her governess. And perhaps this was natural. Diana decided she must be more circumspect in future. A difficult rôle to play, she who had never been circumspect in her life.

They had become very intimate, she and Captain Poppleton. Every day he had accompanied her and Susie on their daily walks. In the beginning he had asked her permission to do so — quite humbly and respectfully. Latterly he had joined them as a matter of course. And he had done so quite openly, right under Mrs. Poppleton's nose, so to speak. Then he joined them in the nursery each afternoon to hear the reading aloud when Susie lay on her back in the sunshine, and Diana's lips curved so deliciously over "Pickwick Papers." He had forgotten

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"what a book" "Pickwick Papers" was. His enthusiasm for it was great. Then there were the dinners when he could sit and look at Diana for an hour unblushingly, Mrs. Poppleton being too taken up with Mercy, too agitated by that girl's unexpected doings, to notice what her brother-in-law might be saying or doing, or where his eyes might be resting.

A man and woman under such conditions, as Captain Poppleton remarked, can become very well known to one another in the space of a fortnight.

And he was to remain another couple of months. Diana's heart beat a trifle more rapidly at his announcement, but outwardly she remained calm. Her sole interest, it would appear, was in the condition of Mrs. Poppleton when she had received the news.

She sat on the hard milking stool, her face between her hands, and gazed thoughtfully into the fire.

"Of what are you thinking?"

"I was wondering if I could persuade the servants to stop."

"Oh," said he. He looked disappointed.

"It is a serious matter. We might be without."

"Without what?"

"Servants, of course."

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"It would be rather fun," said he. "I could help."

"Help at what?" Mrs. Poppleton had a habit of coming into a room and picking up the last remark of a conversation. She paused with her hand on the door.]

"Help in the house if the servants leave." You told me they had given notice, Laura. I have been thinking about the matter. In an emergency I could give a hand."

Mrs. Poppleton failed to see that he was joking. She was a little horrified at his suggestion, though she endeavoured not to show it. The feeling that prompted the suggestion was, no doubt, kindly, but very mistaken, almost wanting in dignity and self-respect coming from a man who was an officer in a Bengal cavalry regiment. She regarded her brother-in-law as a being infinitely superior to the common run of men of her acquaintance, as a figure of romance with his handsome face and figure and gay, dashing personality. She liked a man, so long as it was not her own husband, to be dashing. It excited and thrilled her to dash herself.

"Hugh," she said one evening to Diana—"Captain Poppleton," she corrected herself—"reminds

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me of a cavalier of the Stuart period, one of those dear cavaliers in a doublet and hose."

"But they didn't wear doublets and hose," said Diana.

Mrs. Poppleton was naturally amazed when her governess corrected her. "What then did they wear?" she asked stiffly.

"I suppose you mean the short cloaks and plumed hats."

"Of course, of course. Not much difference. I knew it was something like that — something to do with doublets."

Mrs. Poppleton had not the faintest notion what a doublet might be; but whatever it was she knew her brother-in-law would look well in one, and refused to be set right by her governess.

And now a man so ornamental, so distinguished, so romantic, was calmly offering to "give a hand in the house" if an emergency arose! Mrs. Poppleton caught her breath, always inclined to depart at crises. Her business would be to see that no emergency arose. She might tactfully suggest (as she had) that in view of his prolonged stay her brother-in-law would not object to becoming "one of the family," and then reverting to the "simple little suppers, so nice and homely

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and pleasant," but that was a very different matter to an emergency arising.

Without another word, Mrs. Poppleton turned about and went to her kitchen. She went to interview her servants, she went to eat humble pie and tell them that the homely suppers recommenced from to-morrow evening, to offer them an increase in wages, and to ask them to remain with her until after the departure of Captain Poppleton. She meant, too, to smile upon them — a smile occasionally was so encouraging, so uplifting. She began to compose her smile, to get it ready before she opened the kitchen door.

But she was too late, the smile froze on her lips. The servants had gone!

## CHAPTER XI

The servants had departed, fled, or as Captain Poppleton put it, "done a bolt." How they had managed to get their luggage away unbeknown to Mrs. Poppleton was a mystery never unravelled. Two tin trunks must have somehow descended the stairs, two tin trunks must have crossed the hall to the kitchen and departed through the back door — somewhere; and Mrs. Poppleton had not surprised them in their flight. It was nothing short of miraculous. To her it seemed almost uncanny. She regarded the places where the trunks had stood — cook's by the door, Mercy's to the right of the dressing table — long and thoughtfully, but no elucidation of the mystery presented itself to her. Then she rallied her forces.

The emergency had arisen.

Diana in the week that followed not only earned Mrs. Poppleton's gratitude, but, to a certain extent, her affection, though neither was apparent. Mrs. Poppleton did not believe in sentimentalizing

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toward a governess. But there was a better feeling between them. Mrs. Poppleton was so worried that she could afford to be more considerate to a girl who was so helpful, who made beds and dusted rooms and washed up breakfast things with such speed (certainly a speed that was almost alarming at times, leaving Mrs. Poppleton trembling as to the fate of a much loved slop-basin of a large and useful shape, or a familiar milk jug that had withstood the onslaught] of many a careless parlour-maid, but from which, too, Diana emerged triumphant), and such cheerfulness. And Diana could afford to be patient with Mrs. Poppleton because she herself was so amazingly happy, so suddenly contented with her life, and her surroundings, and her work. Housework, she found to her surprise, to be full of quite unexpected interest, and Victoria she felt had been mistaken in accusing her of lacking the domestic virtues.

She whistled as she shook up the pillows of Mrs. Poppleton's bed. She sang as she dusted the pink cupids of the drawing-room clock. That she whistled because Captain Hugh Poppleton was below and was putting on his boots at that very moment in readiness to accompany her and Susie in a ramble across the fields to Windlesham



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End, the day being bright and frosty, she did not pause to consider. She was a changed Diana in more ways than one. She had ceased for the time being to be introspective. She would have said she had no time, that she was far too busy for self-analysis. That she couldn't be worrying round as to why her spirits were so good when there was a whole pile of dishes waiting to be washed up. Perhaps she was right.

A help was found to do the rougher work and the cooking. Mrs. Poppleton, who spent three entire and successive days in town (much to Hugh's satisfaction), seated in draughty registry offices, succeeded in engaging servants for the New Year, each of whom, from her own showing, was a heaven-sent treasure. The crisis had been successfully coped with. Mrs. Poppleton reviewed the situation with satisfaction. No one could have done better.

Now Christmas Eve had arrived.

An atmosphere of gaiety pervaded the house. Diana and Hugh, assisted by a dancing radiant Susie, had decorated the nursery. Lovely festoons and wreaths of coloured paper hung from wall to wall. Holly and mistletoe crowned the pictures. Powdered glass, dazzling in its frostiness, sparkled over everything.

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"I *do* love you, Angel Pie" — this was Susie's new name for Diana — "I do want to lay my cheek against your satin hair — the frost is so very beautiful."

"So do I," murmured Captain Poppleton beneath his breath. But Diana heard him, and the colour rushed swiftly to her white cheeks. He saw that she had heard him, and over his own face flashed a look of annoyance, of shame, almost of distress. But Diana did not see it, she had turned away to hide her own confusion.

"We must go now and decorate the drawing-room and dining-room and hall, or we shan't be ready when Daddy comes," she said.

Susie followed her downstairs, but Captain Poppleton remained behind. When they had gone, he crossed to the window and stared long and absently at the landscape flushed by a wintry sunset. His attitude was one of dejection, a frown was on his face, his hands were locked as though he were in conflict with some invisible enemy, his gaiety had fallen from him. For long he stood motionless. Once he murmured, "What shall I do? what shall I do?" Darkness descended upon the room. But still he stood. Captain Hugh Poppleton was fighting the biggest battle of his life and he was no coward, but he

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was weak — very weak to-day. "I'll leave to-morrow," he said, and he knew he shouldn't. "I'll go after the New Year. Laura will expect me to stay till then." And still he knew he shouldn't. Diana's laugh reached him from the room below. Then the gong for tea sounded.

Captain Poppleton drew himself up to his full height.

"At least I can love her," he said to himself as he descended the stairs. "No harm in that. A man can't control his emotions." But he did not look at Diana as he entered the room.

Mr. Poppleton arrived just before supper, laden with parcels, tired out after a week's strenuous work, and looking worn and ill.

But the unusual serenity and cheerfulness of his wife and domestic surroundings soothed and comforted him. He had heard by letter of the flight of the servants. He had expected to be greeted by lamentations and tears. He had fretted himself into a headache at the prospect of what was to come. And Mrs. Poppleton, in the purple gown, received him with smiles. It was on the tip of his tongue to say: "Whatever's the matter?" but checked himself in time.

Mr. Poppleton didn't understand his wife

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after seventeen years of marriage. If he had he would have known that her spirits were high simply from the contemplation of her own mighty virtues. Many women, in the face of such adversity as had been hers during the past week, would have succumbed, taken to their beds, given in. And what had she done? Had she collapsed? Had she said: "I am a sufferer from rheumatoid arthritis, I am not strong. Somebody must come to the rescue and find me servants, and get me out of this predicament." But, no. For three whole days she had sat in bitterly cold registry offices, been cross-questioned by impudent girls as to evenings and days out, and been fleeced of different and many five-shilling pieces by many unscrupulous registry office proprietresses. And she had emerged from the fray triumphant and successful with two treasures ahead, and one treasure in the shape of an economical help, who didn't require beer, in the kitchen at that very moment.

Mrs. Poppleton sat down to supper in playful mood. Susie, as it was Christmas Eve, was allowed to stay up. Her husband was home until after the New Year. Her presents in readiness for the morrow were appropriate, and had been secured at a small expenditure — a pincushion,

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for instance, destined for Diana, had cost only one and eleven pence and looked worth double the price. The beef which Mrs. Poppleton was about to carve looked "done to a turn" — what a true treasure was Mrs. Faggott, the help! Cook would have overbaked it. It was a round of spiced beef which had taken fourteen days to prepare. It was an institution of the Poppleton household at Christmas time, and to which Mr. Poppleton was extremely partial. He would have enjoyed it more if Mrs. Poppleton had talked of it less. She carved it now carefully and judiciously. For a week there would be two hungry men in the house — men who were going to shoot. Shooting men, Mrs. Poppleton told herself, were capable of putting away vast quantities of food. The beef would be a stand-by, but its resources must be husbanded.

She threw her usual playful remark at the table: "This beef was spiced by my own hands." It came at an unfortunate moment, for Mr. Poppleton had just come across a bit so hot and spicy that he coughed loudly. Then Captain Poppleton had a similar experience, and called out for water. Soon the only silent member of the table was Susie, who was supping off bread and milk, whilst tears ran down the faces of the others.

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"I can't understand it," cried poor Mrs. Poppleton. "Something must have happened. It has always been so delicious, hasn't it, Chris?"

He nodded spasmodically.

"Fortunately there is cold mutton in the house," said Mrs. Poppleton, trying to keep calm. "Mrs. Faggott shall bring it. Chris, kindly ring the bell. It is the first time it has been a failure. Of course *you* helped me with it, Miss Wenderby, now I come to think of it. I wonder who weighed the pepper."

"You did," said Diana. It was base of Mrs. Poppleton to try and cast the blame upon her. She refused to take the responsibility of an over-peppered twenty-pound round of beef upon her shoulders, especially when at the beginning Mrs. Poppleton had claimed the whole credit of it.

Hugh was amused at the flash in Diana's eyes. "Don't you recollect," she continued, "that you weighed all the ingredients, and I merely rubbed them into the meat?"

But Mrs. Poppleton's memory failed her. She remembered nothing, and she wished to change the conversation, it had become uninteresting. What she desired to know now was,

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whether Hugh would take some pickled cabbage with his cold mutton, as there was some home-made in front of him.

"Not too many pepper-corns in it?" he queried, which was a misplacement of humour. Mrs. Poppleton relapsed into gloom. It was thus that her efforts to make everybody comfortable and happy were received. And her husband never helped her out of a tight place, or stood by her. She had felt so happy too, in such good spirits when she sat down to table. And her husband had kissed her with unusual warmth. And now — she looked reproachfully at the round of beef resting on the sideboard.

Later, in the drawing-room, she watched her husband, brother-in-law, governess and child play at "Happy Family" whilst seated on the white bearskin rug in front of the fire. She never in her life had sat on rugs. She never even lay down on her own couch in public. She considered it a most undignified position for her governess to be in, and later she should speak to her about it. She was going too far.

Mrs. Poppleton sat very upright on her own chair, with her hands folded on her purple knee, and listened to her husband's demand from his governess for "Mr. Bones the butcher," and Cap-

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tain Poppleton's from Susie for "Mrs. Bun the baker's wife."

How happy they all seemed! Their faces wreathed in smiles of easily pleased infants. Susie could scarcely contain herself for excitement. Her father was pleased at witnessing her joy. Hugh, whatever had been his trouble, had forgotten it. Diana's eyes danced in the firelight with merriment at securing "Mr. Tape the tailor."

Mrs. Poppleton suppressed a sigh. When had she seen her husband so gay? When seen his strong, plain features relax into such smiles? And as she watched him her own features contracted with sudden pain. There had been a time — long ago — when she had been able to conjure this look to his face, when he had smiled upon her, when he had laughed boisterously from sheer animal spirits and enjoyment of life. But now — she scrutinized the worn face. What had come between them? She still loved him — and in an hour or two she would go to her own room, and to bed, and hug the sleeping Susie to her starved heart, while he, Chris, her own husband, would lock himself in his little room at the end of the passage! How she shivered at the sound of the turning of the key! How she pressed her face to her pillow to keep back the



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hard, dry sobs! What had come between them? Whose fault was it? Not hers.

Diana turned and met Mrs. Poppleton's eyes. Perhaps she had divined the trouble of the silent, upright woman, for suddenly she arose, and, with a smile and a kindly touch of Mrs. Poppleton's cold hand, she asked her to take her place as she must go and see about the preparation of Susie's bath.

For one moment Mrs. Poppleton hesitated. The next she was seated on the rug asking her husband if he had "Miss Pott the painter's daughter."

That night when she went to bed Diana wrote her Christmas letter to Tommie. It would arrive a day late, but she had not been able to find time before.

She felt wonderfully happy. Outside, beneath her window, there were some carol singers. A big white moon rode high in a frosty sky. Myriads of stars twinkled in the deep clear blue. Her room was cold, her hands were numb, but her heart sang.

The letter was brief, but very kind. There was only one reference to Captain Poppleton, and that was that he was remaining at Bogmere a couple of months longer.

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When Tommie received the letter he took it to the Dale. He found a sheltered spot beneath a gorse bush before opening it. He read it twice. Then he mounted to the flat wind-swept common above the Dale and went for a long walk. He must have tramped twenty-five to thirty miles before returning home footsore and weary.

He remained up till late that night. With his face sunk foward upon his chest he sat till the fire dwindled and died. Then as the clock struck two, he rose and with a "damn him" followed by a reverent "and God bless her" he passed out of the room, and with the lagging footsteps of one who suffers greatly he went up the stairs to bed.

## CHAPTER XII

Diana spent a pleasant Christmas day. She received numerous letters and presents from her home people, and as she opened the parcels her conscience smote her a little. They have been thinking more of her — the dear parents — than she had been thinking of them. They deplored her not being at home — “the first Christmas day upon which one of the children had been absent,” wrote her mother; “they would drink her health at dinner, etc., etc., and hoped she would not be very homesick and dull.”

Diana dressed thoughtfully for church. She had made only the briefest references to Captain Poppleton in her letters, and Tommie had apparently not mentioned his name. Homesick and dull! She sat down on the bed she had just made, and tried to feel homesick and dull. She upbraided herself for her disloyalty — for not wishing to be one of the party at Moss Deeping. She got out her parents' photographs, propped them up in front of her, and stared long and

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earnestly at the loved faces. But no homesick feelings came to her. Finally she gave herself a shake. "Can't feel dull, mother dear, however I try. I'm sorry. But there it is. I love you just the same, but I'd rather be here to-day. Please forgive me."

She put on a fur cap and stole — Tommie's present. How exactly he knew what would suit Diana. The cap, with its smart upstanding tails of fur, might have been measured for the small dark head. She pictured him in Liverpool deep in consultation with the "young lady" who would serve him. His hands in the pockets of his long coat, his dark face earnest, almost solemn, over the weightiness of the problem before him. And he would go through with it so thoroughly. Every hat in the shop would be shown to him before he made his choice; and he would be so courteous to the young lady, so sorry to give her trouble, and she would be so pleased to serve him — this open-handed gentleman who never even asked the price of a thing, but knew his own mind so well.

There was no letter from him. Just a line of good wishes, and as kindly expressed as hers had been to him.

As Diana fixed the pins in the hat, she did not

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feel quite so happy as she had been a few moments before. Tommie would be spending a quiet, dull day with his grandfather. He would go for a ride perhaps in the afternoon. In the evening there would be a long drawn-out dinner, when Mr. Sutherland would probably discuss model dairies. "Poor Tommie!" she sighed, as she ran down the stairs in answer to an urgent summons from Susie that she would be late for church.

Mrs. Poppleton regarded the fur hat with eyes full of anything and everything but admiration. It was of sable; a sable hat on a nursery governess's head was, to say the least of it, unmoral. Mrs. Poppleton felt almost unequal to walking to church with it. She herself wore only a beaver stole — the thing was monstrous. She was filled with a consuming curiosity to know how Diana had come by that sable hat and stole. Who had given them to her? It was on the tip of her tongue to ask her at least a dozen times between their own and the church gates; but Diana was not a person to whom one lightly put questions. Mrs. Poppleton was not by any means in a Christian frame of mind; when she joined in the first hymn and "saluted the happy morn," she felt quite unable to remove her eyes from the tails of fur so close to her.

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Captain Poppleton appeared equally unable to remove his eyes from the face below the tails. Only Mr. Poppleton, Susie and Diana herself kept their eyes in the place they ought to be — namely, in front of them, or on their prayer books.

Mrs. Poppleton heard not one word of the sermon. Her thoughts were either with the fur hat at her side, or the turkey at home in the oven.

Neither did Captain Poppleton hear a word of the sermon. His thoughts were with Diana; and on his face was the expression that it had worn in the nursery on the previous afternoon. An expression as though he was fighting, and fighting a losing game. His lips twitched nervously every now and again, and to hide it he bit fiercely at his drooping moustache. Seen in the strong light of the morning as they left the church, he looked nervous and tired.

But at dinner he resumed his gaiety and light-hearted manner. The Poppletons' presents were opened. There were crackers to pull with Susie. Mr. Poppleton was in boisterous mood with a paper cap on his head. Mrs. Poppleton was uncomplaining, as, in the roasting of the turkey, Mrs. Faggott had distinguished herself. Diana was cheerful, and looking forward to an after-

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noon off. The Bruce-Napiers had written and invited her to join them at tea that day.

Mrs. Poppleton had given her consent to her going fairly ungrudgingly. Her governess had worked well during the past week, she therefore merited a little reward. But the fur cap and the stole still rankled with her. She meant to discover the giver of them somehow or other. She watched Diana off from the window. She was addicted to watching people off, including her servants on a Sunday afternoon. If they were dressed too smartly she told them of it — quite tactfully, of course, but still she told them. She said overdressed servants<sup>1</sup> seen leaving a house gave a bad tone to it, just as bits of stray paper lying about a front garden gave it a bad and neglected appearance. Mrs. Poppleton rarely went out without bearing in front of her a piece of paper on the point of her umbrella.

To her horror, she saw that Diana was accompanied by Captain Poppleton. Quite calmly, in broad daylight, unaccompanied by Susie, she passed out of the front gate *with* Captain Poppleton. And both were laughing and talking as though nothing unusual were happening. Mrs. Poppleton stood transfixed while you could have counted twenty. Then she rallied her

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forces, made a dart for the door, swiftly crossed the hall, opened the front door and more than measured her length on the mat — the last bit of hall had been slippery owing to Mrs. Faggott's almost superhuman efforts with beeswax and turpentine. She was considerably hurt. An O. S. woman cannot fall about with impunity. By the time she had picked herself up Diana and Hugh were out of sight.

He had not asked her if he could go with her. He just appeared in the hall as she came down stairs and followed her out of the door as though it were the most natural thing in the world; and she felt it would have been priggish and unfriendly if she had remonstrated with him. Besides, she wanted him to come.

The world that wintry afternoon was beautiful, still and sweet-scented with the fragrance of damp earth and ploughed fields. It was not a seasonable Christmas day. There had been a change in the night, and rain in the early morning. Everything smelt clean and fresh.

"Do you think your friends will give me some tea?" he asked, "or think me very calm and impertinent? I felt I couldn't stick an afternoon in without you." He was helping her over the first stile of the fields leading to Windlesham End



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(Tommie would have grinned at any one daring to help Diana over stiles), and for an instant he remained possessed of her hand after she had jumped lightly from the stile to the soft, springy turf, and in that instant Diana knew that she was young — and in love.

Does the reader remember the moment, the exquisite, palpitating moment, when he discovered that he was young? Perhaps he never made the discovery till it was too late. Perhaps it is too long ago to remember. But to some of us comes the knowledge of the priceless gift that is ours while it is still in our possession. It may come to us when we are climbing a high mountain, when the keen, invigorating air fills our lungs and veins as with intoxicating wine, when our eager, buoyant feet press forward to reach the top, and when we shout and sing for sheer joy at just being alive in a world so glorious. It may come to us in the dawn of a summer morning, when the world, fresh from its sleep, is fair and unsullied yet by the presence of man, when the dew lies unbrushed on the meadows — a million drops twinkling and blinking in the sunshine, and the flowers open their sleepy eyes to the blue of heaven. It may come to us with the knowledge that we love — twice blessed moment. And it came to

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Diana with the touch of Hugh Poppleton's hand — she knew that she both loved and was young. The blood rushed in a burning tide to her cheeks and forehead, even to the very tips of her ears and neck, while her heart beat wildly, tumultuously, and she trembled from head to foot, almost fainting. She buried her glowing face in her muff to hide her confusion, to veil her face from the look in Hugh Poppleton's eyes. Then she recovered herself. Her colour died away from her face, and her pulses steadied down, and she walked on quickly, with some careless word as to the welcome she was sure he would receive from Katherine. But she had lived, lived to the very uttermost, in that supreme moment, body and soul tuned to the very highest pitch of happiness.

And her thoughts had turned to Tommie away in Heatherland, even then, even as they had always turned when she was profoundly moved.

Another man had taught her the meaning of the word love, had taught her that she was young, had just set her pulses leaping in riotous fashion. Yet her thoughts had turned to her old-tried friend. Woman is indeed a paradox.

She wanted to tell Tommie of her discovery, of her strange, new, glorious sensations. Had she

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not told him everything since she was a little child? In her absorption she forgot that Tommie loved her. That as she was feeling toward this man, walking silently at her side, so Tommie had been feeling toward her for years, and a thousand times intensified. For Tommie's love was a finer thing than Diana's perhaps could ever be, because he had suffered through it. It was of the finest and purest gold, with all the dross purged from it through that suffering. He would have been content just to serve Diana had she given herself to him, asking for nothing — but buoyed with the hope that springs eternal that a day would come when she might be able to return his love.

Could Diana ever love thus? Could she ever rise to such heights? Ever be content to give without receiving?

She was chatting lightly and gaily now, and had regained complete control of her emotions. She avoided meeting Hugh's ardent gaze. She refused his help over further stiles. She refused to drift into the intimate personal talk they had drifted into so much of late. That must come, she thought, when — she could hardly frame the words even to herself — well, later. And as she thought of what might come later, again she

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trembled and hurried on — unconsciously — and a little breathlessly.

She believed that Hugh Poppleton loved her. Experience had taught her the way in which a man looks at a woman when he loves her; the manner in which he speaks to her — the tender, yet respectful and humble manner; his desire to serve her and obey her lightest wish; his absorbing interest in everything relating to her — of her home, of her childhood, of her views on books, poetry (especially poetry), music, art, games, pursuits. Of his delight when he makes the startling discovery that she likes travel or the theatre.

Yes, Hugh had played the game of making love in the old, old way. And in his careless, happy, dashing personality there was the something indefinable which appealed to the something in Diana equally indefinable. Perhaps it was his calm, good-humoured indifference to everything and everybody — at the moment — but Diana. He was absorbed in her — not in Tommie's unselfish, devotional way — that would have irritated her in Hugh — but he just appropriated her quite regardless of what Mrs. Poppleton, or even Diana herself, might say or think. Took possession of her, courted her, talked with

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her, even took care of her, which would have tickled Tommie had he known of it — and she actually liked it! Liked having chairs pushed to the fire for her, hassocks put for her feet to rest upon, doors opened for her, candles lit at night for her, umbrellas opened for her — the expression on Tommie's face had he seen Captain Poppleton opening Diana's umbrella would have been a sight for the gods.

A time comes in most women's lives — even the most emancipated and independent women — when they are glad for some strong man to come along and take care of them. It had come to Diana now. A changed Diana indeed.

The Bruce-Napiers gave Captain Poppleton a cordial welcome. They knew that he was on a visit to Bogmere. Diana, who had been to tea with them most Sundays since her arrival at the Poppletons', had referred to him casually; and Katharine had become suspicious. If Diana had not been so casual Katharine would not have been suspicious. It takes a woman to understand another. Though had she questioned her friend on the subject, Diana would have been quite honest and frank about it. She might try to act a part — and did it badly, Tommie always said — but she could never equivocate.

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Katharine was better, though she still limped a little and had to use her foot carefully, and looked pretty and attractive in a green velvet gown, ultra artistic and traily. She seemed brighter and happier too, Diana thought, more contented and much more affectionate toward her husband. While, as for Mr. Bruce-Napier, his plump, honest face fairly radiated cheerfulness. Diana wondered if they had come into a fortune, or whether a poem of Katherine's had been accepted — Katherine had begun to write poetry, and, while she was trying to find words to rhyme with blossoms and meadows, Travers, the maid, ran the house and entertained her young man, who played a penny whistle with much skill and feeling, in the kitchen.

Katherine, however, to-day, appeared to have taken the reins of management into her own hands, and the tea was quite nice and appetizing, and the butter didn't taste of onions, which Diana thought was a distinct advance. Katherine, too, conversationally, was in her most amusing vein. She offered Captain Poppleton in turn Bernard Shaw, W. B. Yeats, Alfred Noyes, Dante, Rossetti, William Blake, and Matthew Arnold as subjects for poetical discussion, and poor Hugh's flounderings — for he had not read a word of any one of

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them — tickled Diana greatly. On Chesterton he was a little more at home, for he had read "The Napoleon of Notting Hill" (more or less under compulsion, he afterward told Diana), but when Katherine began to dissect the book, she soon discovered that he had not understood a word of it, and he knew that she had made this discovery, but gamely he struggled on, and agreed with his hostess that Chesterton would find lines of beauty in a bathing machine if anybody could.

Mr. Bruce-Napier came to the rescue after a while.

"Don't you let that wife of mine worry you, Captain Poppleton. I think Chesterton's an infernal ass, though he's clever enough in juggling with words. He doesn't really know anything, but has a gift of making you think he does. Why, I could write as well if" — he paused — "if I had his language at my finger ends," and when everybody roared, he carried Hugh off to his den for a smoke.

And then Katharine shyly told Diana her news while the colour crept into her cheeks, and a smile played round the corners of her lips.

"I thought you must have come into a fortune," said Diana, "and — this is a thousand times

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better. I *am* glad, Katharine. Isn't your husband delighted?"

"Yes, and proud isn't the word."

"It's just what you wanted to complete your happiness," said Diana softly, "a little child. Katharine, it's too beautiful."

"I know," returned her friend. "I am grateful, and I never knew before how much I loved Maurice. This — has taught me."

"I'm so glad," said Diana.

"He's the best fellow in the world," said Katharine emphatically.

"I'm quite sure of it," agreed Diana.

"I shall be late," said Diana in a vexed tone as they crossed the fields on their way back. "I said I would be in at half-past six."

"Will it matter?" inquired her companion. Captain Poppleton was in no mood to hurry. The moon had risen, and Diana, with her pale cheeks and inscrutable eyes below the fur cap, was wonderfully attractive in the moonlight.

"I thought you might have gained some understanding of your sister-in-law during the weeks you have been at Bogmere," laughed Diana. "She likes people to be punctual, and I sympathize with her."



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"I hate to think of your doing all this work," he said angrily "and being at the beck and call of ——" He stopped abruptly. Mrs. Poppleton was, after all, his brother's wife, and he was greatly attached to and deeply sorry for poor old Chris. What a mess he had made of his life! And how many men muck up their lives! His face was wretched.

"I am beginning to be sorry for Mrs. Poppleton," said Diana gently, "so please do not pity me. I know you have often wanted to talk about her, and now I am willing, because I want you to be sorry for her too. She is so limited, so narrow, and so unhappy. Her life is a tragedy ——"

"No more than my brother's," interrupted Hugh savagely, "poor devil."

"Yes, it is," went on Diana, earnestly; "it is worse for her because she still loves your brother. In her own way she loves him passionately. She feels their enforced separation most keenly."

"And as soon as he arrives she starts to make him uncomfortable and wretched."

"I know. That is her unfortunate manner. And she is over-anxious about everything relating to his comfort, and all on edge, and in a nervous, sensitive condition because she is beginning to feel he no longer loves her. She has fought

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against it, I am sure. For long she would not admit it even to herself ——”

“How do you know all this? Has she spoken of it to you?”

“Not directly, but a word dropped here and there — a reference to what *had* been in the past. Once she said, and I am sure that she was unconscious that she had said it: ‘In the days when my husband loved me,’ it was very pathetic to me — that past tense.” Diana was getting over a stile as she spoke, and in her absorption in her subject she hardly noticed that Hugh again held her, and both her hands this time, as he helped her down, till she caught sight of his face in the moonlight. Then she saw the mixture of passion and misery on every line of it, and that his features were working convulsively.

“What is the matter?” she asked involuntarily.

“Diana, I am wretched,” he said in a hoarse voice. “I — I ——” he broke off. “Some day perhaps I shall be able to tell you — something, something very near to my heart, if you’ll let me.” He let go of her hands, almost thrust them from him. “Forgive me. I’m sorry. Go on with your story, with what you were saying. You were talking of my poor brother and his wife. I am not sorry for her. I consider her a tiresome, un-

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reasonable, selfish woman." He talked fast and was walking rapidly, "and I can see only one way out of it all ——"

"And that?"

"Judicial separation. He can't divorce her, and she can't divorce him, owing to our beautiful man-made laws. They must stick to one another for life, and will, owing to the quixotism of my brother's nature, and she will slowly kill him. Sap his life blood, kill him inch by inch, and then erect a marble cross, expressing the most touching and beautiful sentiments to his memory."

His voice was so full of bitter sarcasm that Diana was amazed. She had had no conception that he felt his brother's unhappy position so deeply.

"Marriages should be more easily annulled. Don't you think so?" He stooped and peered into her face.

"No, I don't," said Diana steadily. "I think it would be a bad thing, and evil in its results, especially for women. People always whimper and cry out at the first disagreeables that cross their paths. They expect life to be too easy, too happy. They are losing their grit and hardiness. If they make marriages that prove to be a failure, I think they should abide by them and try to make the best of a bad job. My

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friend, Tommie Sutherland, has said all this — it is not original — but I agree with him. He is often very wise, a thinker more than a talker. You see,” she continued, “if one has tiresome fathers or mothers, or brothers, one has to put up with them; the relationship cannot be lightly broken. But as soon as ever a husband or wife finds out that they have made a mistake in their marriage they begin to howl and talk of incompatibility of temper and a judicial separation — it’s so cowardly. And frequently you will find one of the two still loves the other, which makes the position doubly sad. And if only they would wait, a day might come when, after much patience, much striving, much forbearance, they had both learned to love, both learned their lesson, both learned how fine a thing is sacrifice, both learned that it is more blessed to give than to receive —” She broke off abruptly, embarrassed, and with the colour again sweeping into her cheeks. She had warmed to her subject, forgetting what an intimate one it was; and had she not barred all intimacies of speech for to-night? But she had been carried away. Word for word she had repeated what Tommie had said to her in a letter when she had told him of the Poppletons’ threatened shipwreck of their love

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and lives — Tommie with his ideals and patient nature, and quixotism, who never failed to tilt at the wrongs of the world if there was a possibility of righting them. "I am sorry," she laughed, "for airing my opinions in such dogmatic fashion, but again I am quoting my friend, it's a habit I've contracted, but he's generally so right. He lives at Heatherland with a strict, dull, old grandfather. He's clever, original, and an omnivorous reader; there's scarcely anything he doesn't know, from the name of every battleship, cruiser and destroyer in our navy down to the anatomy of the most minute beetle. But he's frightfully humble, and — his life is not the rosiest."

"He appears, though, to be fortunate in his friends." Captain Poppleton's voice was pleasant, but beneath the pleasantness was a note of something — perhaps jealousy, which amused Diana. "Has he had much experience of ill-assorted couples that he feels himself in a position to advise on their methods of procedure?"

Now he was satirical, which Diana immediately resented. She might not and did not love Tommie, but she was a loyal friend to him.

"Mr. Sutherland thinks and reads and observes widely ——"

"That is not experience," interrupted Hugh.

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"A man, before he dogmatizes must have experience ——"

"But Tommie doesn't dogmatize," said Diana hotly. "I tell you he's the humblest of men ——" She stopped. Captain Poppleton was trying to "draw" her; he should find a blank. "I am very, very fond of my old friend Tommie," she said sweetly. "We have known each other since we were children, and are real friends."

"*You* may be, but not Mr. Sutherland," said Hugh with some irritation. He had grown tired of Tommie.

"Why?" asked Diana quietly.

"How could he be a *friend* knowing you? No man, if young, could be a friend to a girl like you. It would be impossible, and you know it. And please don't let's talk about him any more."

"Very well," agreed Diana, "and I'm sorry my subjects of conversation should be distasteful to you. Shall we discuss the political situation?"

"No," said Captain Poppleton. "Just let's walk along in silence; the night and you and the moonlight are so beautiful, and are sufficient food for thought."

He knew, indeed, too well, how to play the old, old game of making love.

## CHAPTER XIII

Diana found, after hastily removing her hat and coat and hurrying to the nursery, that Mrs. Poppleton had started to give Susie her bath, and wore her most heroic look of self-martyrdom. This was always her method of dealing with people who were late — she commenced to do their work for them, and with a cheerful, never-mind-me-sort of air which once drove a cook, who found Mrs. Poppleton washing up dishes one Sunday night on her being seven minutes late, to give notice on the spot.

Diana was ten minutes late and was full of apologies. She had enjoyed her afternoon. She was grateful to Mrs. Poppleton for granting her this half-holiday when she was without servants and only a Mrs. Faggott in the house as a stand-by if anything serious happened, such as Susie falling down the stairs, or the house being burnt down to the ground, which Mrs. Poppleton felt might happen at any moment; and Diana was really sorry for having exceeded the time

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stated to her for her return. But Mrs. Poppleton received all her expressions of regret with this heroic fortitude, this gentle air of resignation, which made Diana feel inclined to scream.

"Never mind," she said, "I am used to it, used to being the drudge of the house while everybody else goes out and enjoys themselves — Now, my poppet, for the cold sponge — you and — Captain Poppleton disappear somewhere *together* — you *say* to Mrs. Bruce-Napier's. My husband goes for a long walk, while I — do the work."

"But you have been to sleep nearly all afternoon, mother," interposed Susie, whilst wriggling away from the rough towel with which Mrs. Poppleton was scrubbing the soft little body, and seeking refuge with Diana. Her dear Miss Wenderby, her dear Angel Pie, was being rebuked, being scolded. Susie knew this attitude of her mother's only too well. She talked in the same way to daddy when she was vexed with him. Said things "didn't matter" and "don't mind me so long as the rest of you are happy," and then daddy swore.

She put up her arms to Diana. "Will you finish me?" she pleaded. "Mother is tired, aren't you, mother?"



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"Miss Wenderby shall *not* finish you. Come here, Susie, and stand still or I — shall slap you."

Susie was so astonished that she did stand still. Her mother had never slapped her in her life. Her eyes filled with tears, and at once Mrs. Poppleton was sorry, and was more than ever filled with resentment toward Diana.

"You see," she cried, "even the child is tired and overwrought. The whole household has been upset through your selfishness and thoughtlessness."

But still Diana kept her temper. Was she not happy and Mrs. Poppleton unhappy? She could afford to be generous.

Mr. Poppleton's step was heard outside, and he seemed to bring a breath of the cool night air, wholesome and sweet, into the hot, overcharged atmosphere. He had been for a long walk. Had had tea at a wayside inn.

"The light in the sky at sunset was beautiful. Did you notice it, Laura?" He flung himself into the rocking-chair and drew Susie — now in her red flannel dressing-gown — on to his knee, and she nestled her head, ornamented with curl rags, against his "scrubby" shoulder.

"No," said Mrs. Poppleton, "I did not see it. I was far too busy and tired to find time to look

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at sunsets. Susie, you must go to bed, you'll catch cold."

"One moment," pleaded her father. "It's so jolly and cosy in here. Draw up your chair, Laura, and you, Miss Wenderby, and we'll tell Christmas stories." He saw there was something the matter, that there was trouble in the air, that Diana was in disgrace. He was anxious to smooth things over if he could. He felt in no mood for quarrels. But Mrs. Poppleton meant to have one with somebody. She was ripe for it. Her resentment against her husband, brother-in-law, and Diana had been growing with each hour they were absent on enjoyment bent while she was left alone. She forgot that Mr. Poppleton had asked, nay even begged, her to accompany him on his walk, and Susie could go too. No, Susie had a slight cold, and she, Mrs. Poppleton, could not leave Mrs. Faggott alone in the house.

"Why not?" he had asked. "She doesn't look a nervous woman or likely to be afraid."

"That is not the point. Mrs. Faggott is a good worker, but I don't know anything about her character."

"You mean she might walk off with the spoons?"

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"Not exactly spoons," replied Mrs. Poppleton, who was nothing if not literal, "but sugar and tea."

And Mr. Poppleton had left the house irritated and annoyed, but had returned at peace with the world because of the beauty of the night. Mrs. Poppleton, who had sat with closed blinds, knew nothing of the beauty of the night and didn't want to know. What she wanted was to vent her irritation upon some one. Diana refused to quarrel. There was only her husband left.

A pitiful scene followed. Diana, carrying Susie off to bed, left them to it. Afterward she went to her room and drawing up the blind sat for a while and stared into the night. That marriage could ever come to this! It was too sordid, too sad. Mr. and Mrs. Poppleton had sworn to love and cherish each other till death divided them. She shuddered as she recalled their faces a few minutes back — faces distorted with passion and hatred on the one side, and with hopeless misery on the other. Diana, accustomed to the happiness of her father and mother and the beauty of their love for one another, had not conceived the possibility of a union such as Mr. and Mrs. Poppleton's, and it filled her with a great depression. For the time being she forgot Hugh

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Poppleton and herself. She lived no longer in a beautiful present and a rosy future. She thought only of the tragedy of the lives of the man and woman behind the closed doors at the other end of the passage.

She returned to the nursery after a while in order to tidy it up, and there she found Mrs. Poppleton cowering over the fire, which was nearly out, her face in her hands, her attitude one of the deepest dejection. But she roused herself at Diana's step and, picking up a brush, vigorously swept up the hearth and flicked the bars of the grate. She did this so long and so thoroughly and so unnecessarily, as it all had to be done again in the morning, that Diana knew something was coming, and lingered after she had finished her own work to hear what it was. The dejected figure had touched her.

Presently it came — awkwardly, almost aggressively:

"Miss Wenderby, I conclude you do not say anything of our affairs — our private affairs to outsiders?"

"No," said Diana, a little taken aback. "At least not to anybody but a friend of mine — an old friend to whom I have always told everything."

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"She doesn't live anywhere in the neighbourhood?" Mrs. Poppleton's voice was sharp.

"It isn't a woman. It's a Mr. Sutherland who lives in Heatherland, and who is as close as the grave. But I will not mention anything again if you do not wish it."

"I don't wish it. Who is this Mr. Sutherland? Are you engaged to him?" The question was flung at her.

"Has that anything to do with the subject under discussion?" asked Diana, her temper rising; but, suddenly catching sight of Mrs. Poppleton's face in a little jet of flame which sprang up from the dying fire, a face that was all disfigured and tear-stained from weeping, she softened. "No, I am not engaged to him, and — I won't mention your affairs again, I promise, to him or to anybody."

"Of course, there is nothing really to tell."

"Of course not," agreed Diana.

Mrs. Poppleton rose and walked over to the chest of drawers, where she refolded some hair-ribbons of Susie's.

"You are present sometimes when Mr. Poppleton and I have — an occasional difference of opinion."

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"Yes," said Diana. She thought it was a mild way of putting it.

"Even a few words occasionally."

"Yes," said Diana again.

"Such words are inevitable at times, even between the happiest of couples."

"Of course."

"Especially when one is — is — nervous and artistic, and — Mr. Poppleton is" — Mrs. Poppleton paused, then she swallowed it — "so fond of me that he gets vexed when I am worried. He doesn't like me to be worried."

"Of course not." Diana felt it was safe to confine herself to short sentences.

"You think . . . I mean you have noticed how . . . how fond he is of me?" On Mrs. Poppleton's tear-stained face was an eager tense look. She stopped folding hair-ribbons while she waited for Diana's reply.

"Yes," said Diana gently.

A recording angel may have entered up the lie. But another, an angel of pity, an angel of much understanding, wiped it out again. "Better to lie a little than be unhappy much," says the little Japanese in "The Darling of the Gods." And that was how Diana felt. She had lied, but Mrs. Poppleton

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was the happier, and perhaps a better woman for that lie.

She moved toward the door. "Supper is ready, Miss Wenderby, and — I am sorry for being cross just now. I ——" She vanished. She could say no more all at once. It was too difficult.

Diana felt glad she had had sufficient courage to tell that lie.

The Christmas week was a success on the whole. The men went shooting and had some good sport. Once Mrs. Poppleton, Diana and Susie joined them for tea at a cottage three miles distant from Bogmere, and Mrs. Poppleton managed to walk without one reference to her "affliction." Perhaps she feared further suggestions from Diana of living on sugar and a clay soil. Over the tea she was quite gay. They were getting it for sixpence each, including jam, and Hugh would probably pay for it.

Her spirits drooped a little on the return journey. Diana and Hugh were together and far ahead of the others. A governess, if she walked anywhere but with her employers, should be behind and not in front. She said this to Mr. Poppleton.

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"But it is not her fault," said he. "Hugh simply carried her off. I saw him."

"She should not permit herself to be carried off. She has a strong will when she likes ——" There was feeling in Mrs. Poppleton's voice.

"Ah, well, never mind!" said Mr. Poppleton. "They seem very happy together."

He was right. They did seem happy. Even the back view of the couple denoted that they were in festive mood. Diana's walk was springy as a goat's on the hills. Hugh's laughter came to them on the still wintry air. A robin, on a bare thorn tree, chirruped gaily in sympathy as they passed.

Hugh, whatever had been his trouble, had succeeded in forgetting or banishing it. He had the faculty of putting disagreeable things out of his path, and snapping his fingers at them in passing. He devoted himself to Diana in a manner almost shameless, Mrs. Poppleton thought, considering they were not engaged, and never likely to be. He was only flirting with her after the manner of men when away on a holiday. At the end of his visit he would ride away from Bogmere with a kiss perhaps (though Mrs. Poppleton did not in her heart believe the latter, knowing Diana) and a wave of his hand, and never more than a passing thought to the girl he had left



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behind him. That an officer in a Bengal cavalry regiment should seriously fall in love with, and desire to marry, a nursery governess never entered Mrs. Poppleton's remotest thoughts. The thing was inconceivable. Young dukes might lose their heads over chorus girls who entangled and married the young dukes. Diana was not like that, Mrs. Poppleton told herself, she was too — well, too straight and well bred, and what a tribute to Diana.

On the morning following she, therefore, received somewhat of a shock when Susie, who had awakened early, said calmly, "Mother, Uncle Hugh is going to marry Miss Wenderby." Indeed so startled was Mrs. Poppleton, who had just leant out of bed to place a tea-cup on the chair at the side, that she overbalanced herself and nearly fell out.

"What — do you mean? . . . How do you know? How — *dare* you say such a thing, Susie?" Mrs. Poppleton, in her agitation, sat straight up in bed and stared at the child fixedly. She could scarcely believe her ears. Scarcely believe that Susie had uttered such words. She must have dreamt them.

Susie, seeing what an impression she had made, also sat up in bed prepared to enjoy herself.

"I — I don't mean exactly they are engaged

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same as in the books read aloud to me. But I'm sure Uncle Hugh wants to marry Miss Wenderby. He gives her flowers — I've seen him. And Miss Wenderby is so happy — she sings now, and she never used to, when she is dressing me. And — Uncle Hugh always does what he wants, most big gentlemen do," she finished conclusively, "and I'm so glad. I love my Angel Pie, and she would be my aunt, wouldn't she?"

Mrs. Poppleton had the power, when greatly moved, of expressing in her body as well as with her tongue her unbridled emotions. Her limbs now beneath the bedclothes became positively contorted, and quite alarmed little Susie.

"Are you ill, mother?" she asked.

Mrs. Poppleton nodded her head.

"I am ill and upset at what you have said. You are a naughty little girl *even* to think such things, let alone say them. Uncle Hugh will *never* marry Miss Wenderby, never. And you must not speak of it again. Do you hear, Susie? I know you did not mean to be naughty, but children should never discuss such matters. Have you spoken of it to Miss Wenderby?"

Susie nodded in the affirmative.

"Good gracious! And to Uncle Hugh?"

Again she nodded.

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Mrs. Poppleton closed her eyes, while she straightened out her limbs, which were becoming cramped. Then she opened them again slowly and painfully as though she found life too difficult to face. Susie watched her in awed wonderment.

"What did Miss Wenderby say?"

"She laughed and kissed me, and her cheeks were lovely pink."

"I don't want to hear anything about her cheeks. And Uncle Hugh?"

"He kissed me too and said 'I—I'— it's hard to remember exactly what he said, mother."

"Go on," commanded Mrs. Poppleton; "you must try and remember. You must lie there in bed till you *do* remember, Susie."

Susie looked on the point of tears. Her little mouth puckered up and her cheeks became crimson. She was no longer a precocious little girl, but a worried, unhappy baby. Why was her mother so cross? What had she *said*? Why did she look like that? Suddenly inspiration came. "Don't you want Uncle Hugh to marry Miss Wenderby, mother?"

"Certainly not." When Mrs. Poppleton snapped her jaws together in such fashion it always moved Diana to laughter, but it merely frightened Susie. Tears came to her eyes. She

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wished Miss Wenderby would come for her and carry her off to be dressed.

Mrs. Poppleton, observing the tears, told her not to cry and be a baby, and that if she liked she could get out of her own bed and come to her mother's.

Tucked up against Mrs. Poppleton's arm and unable to see her face Susie felt less frightened, and tried hard to remember what Uncle Hugh had said.

"We were in the nursery, and Miss Wenderby was getting ready to go out, and Uncle Hugh had a box in his hand which he said had just come by post ——"

"I know," said Mrs. Poppleton; "I saw it arrive, and wondered what was in it. It was a long thin box."

"Yes," said Susie, "and it had carnations in it — lovely big pink ones, with long, long stalks. He showed them to me and let me smell them, and he said he was going to give them to Miss Wenderby."

"Good gracious!" Mrs. Poppleton nearly shot Susie out of bed with the violence of her movement. "Carnations at this time of the year! They must cost a fortune. Go on, Susie."

Susie, holding on to the rail head of the bed,

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continued: "Then I said, 'Do you love Miss Wenderby, Uncle Hugh?' And he said 'Yes, Susie, very much.' And I said, 'Are you going to marry her same as David married Dora?' And he said . . ." Again Susie's memory failed her.

"Go on, darling," continued Mrs. Poppleton feverishly. "What did Uncle Hugh say? Try hard to remember."

"It was something about God. Something . . ." The child knit her brows, but it would not come.

"Was it — God help me, I will?" How Mrs. Poppleton hoped it wasn't. How great was her relief when Susie shook her fair head.

"No, it wasn't that. Uncle Hugh looked unhappy when he said it, and he wiped his face with his handkerchief. It was . . . Oh, mother, it is hard. I can't remember. Does it matter very much — I know . . . it's just come, it was "I would to God I could." Susie was quite triumphant, and almost shouted it out.

"Ah!" Mrs. Poppleton's breath left her lungs in one big wave, in an immense sigh of satisfaction. He had said that — "I would to God I could." He realized that the thing was impossible. He had the sense to see it was

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impossible. He recognized the difference of their social positions. Whatever he might wish or desire — and men are so easily carried away — he had the sense to see that such a difference, such a wide gulf, could never be bridged over. Again Mrs. Poppleton let forth a sigh, leaving her lungs deflated and flat. She had been right. Hugh was merely amusing himself, passing the time with Diana for want of something better to do. Her relief was enormous. Then, perhaps because her mind was at rest — Diana Wenderby would *not* enter the Poppleton family — more generous feelings came to her. It seemed a little hard on the girl, a little unfair that Captain Poppleton should amuse himself at her expense in this light and wanton fashion. Diana, after all, was a nice, good girl and worthy of a better fate. Had Tommie known that Mrs. Poppleton thought of Diana as a “nice, good girl” he would have been immensely tickled. Once Diana had said to him: “Call me any and every thing in the world but an ‘estimable person.’ That I could not bear, the insult would be too great.” And when Mrs. Poppleton now thought of Diana as “nice and good” surely it was tantamount to thinking of her as “estimable.” However, Diana never knew, which was a mercy, and Mrs. Poppleton

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perhaps never really thought it, but merely used the words in her own mind without considering their significance, as one who might speak of Milan Cathedral as a "nice cathedral," and St. Francis of Assisi as a "good man."

When she was dressed and had breakfasted she felt impelled to speak to her husband of what Susie had told her.

Mr. Poppleton was busy. A birch tree in the garden had just attracted his attention; its straight, white, shiny trunk, and bare, delicate, feathery branches against a gray-blue wintry sky, and in the foreground a low bush of scarlet-berried holly, made a striking little picture in the pale sunshine.

Eager to transmit it to paper he fetched his materials and had just made a start when Mrs. Poppleton bore in upon him.

"Chris," she said, "I want to speak to you."

"H'm?" Mr. Poppleton, who had a brush in his mouth, intimated that he was listening.

"It's about Hugh and Miss Wenderby."

Mr. Poppleton at once removed the brush from his mouth. "They're not engaged?" he cried gladly and hopefully.

"Engaged! Do you wish them to be?"

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Mr. Poppleton averted his eyes. When his wife spoke like that he allowed his gaze to rest anywhere but upon her.

"Do you wish them to be?" Mrs. Poppleton repeated.

"Yes," said he bravely.

"You wish your brother—an officer in a Bengal cavalry regiment—to marry your nursery governess, who washes and bathes your child?" Mrs. Poppleton sat down and folded her hands. "You wish your brother to marry a girl who is little better than a nurse? You wish her to be my sister-in-law? Think of what my family, of what your family, of what the Bogmere people would say!"

"I should think if they had any sense they would say Hugh was a lucky man. I know I should." He was struggling hard to keep his temper. Steadily he kept his gaze on the slender, graceful birch tree. He would have the courage of his opinions, but he would *not* quarrel this morning. He returned to work on the morrow, his week was up. The last day should be spent in peace and harmony. His soul and spirit revolted from the perpetual wrangling and bickering between himself and his wife. There should be no more this last day. With careful, steady



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hand he worked in the delicate gray trunk of the birch tree.

"I repeat," said Mrs. Poppleton, "would you care to saddle us with a sister-in-law who has taught and dressed and — bathed our child?"

And then Mr. Poppleton let forth the vials of his wrath. He could contain himself no longer. His wife was so intensely aggravating.

"Bathe our child! Great God above, is there anything disgraceful in bathing a little child? And if there were, would Miss Wenderby be doing it? Not she; she's not the kind to do anything that would cause her shame — and it's just because she's such a lady, such a thoroughbred, so altogether large minded, that she does what you would term menial work, so naturally and sweetly. Some day perhaps Susie will realize the privilege of having been washed by so fine a creature. I'll see that she does. And, Heaven help me, I'll teach her to try to be what Miss Wenderby is — not mean, and little, and poor-spirited. . . ." He checked himself with a groan. "Oh, Laura, don't try me so bitterly. I was resolved this morning that you and I would spend our last day together happily, with no quarrelling, no angry words, and now" — he laid his brushes down and took her hands with

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impetuous movement — “already we’re at it.” He looked at her appealingly, imploringly, as a dog looks at his master when craving his mercy even when conscious of having done no wrong.

“I have no wish to quarrel,” returned Mrs. Poppleton, her hands limp and unresponsive in his. “I never do. You always begin them. I merely say, I do not wish Hugh to marry Miss Wenderby; I say it quietly, absolutely without heat or temper, and I repeat it. We know nothing of Miss Wenderby’s family. Her father might have been in trade, he might have sold things — over a counter. You never can tell. However, I have no fear that your brother will so forget himself. He has too much sense.”

“If only he would forget himself, as you put it, and succeed in winning Miss Wenderby, I should regard him as the luckiest of men,” repeated Mr. Poppleton slowly and obstinately.

“Chris, do you know anything of this girl’s family?” almost screamed Mrs. Poppleton at her exasperating husband. “We know nothing of it, absolutely nothing. She’s never mentioned it. Never even said what her father was or is.”

“And for that very reason I should say she’s come of good stock. It’s the people who are for everlastingly impressing upon you the length of

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their family tree and the grandeur of their connections who are generally nobodies. The nicest people are simple and unassuming, and not inclined to dub everybody but themselves common. They ——”

But Mrs. Poppleton refused to wait and hear any more. She hadn't the patience, she said, and went in search of her brother-in-law. She must sound a note of warning to him. He might have every intention of being circumspect and sensible in his relations with Diana, but men, especially men of Captain Poppleton's type, were weak when in the hands of a clever girl. Not that Mrs. Poppleton thought that Diana would be clever by design, or through malice aforethought, but simply because she couldn't help it, and of making the most of her sex attractions, which, Mrs. Poppleton was bound to admit, were by no means inconsiderable.

She found Captain Poppleton in an armchair, his long legs stretched luxuriously in front of him to the fire, in the drawing-room.

He rose courteously and wheeled up another chair for her.

She started playfully: “Hugh, I've a crow to pick with you.”

“Indeed, what's the trouble?” There was

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amusement in his lazy blue eyes. His sister-in-law's playful ways invariably moved him to laughter. They were so obviously forced. Mrs. Poppleton was rarely able to feel genuinely playful — life was too difficult and hard.

"You are paying too much attention to my little governess."

"Too much attention to your little governess!" Hugh found it difficult to connect a little governess in any way with Diana. He was very surprised. "Who is she?"

"Who is she? Ah, you *will* have your little joke, you naughty boy!"

Hugh just sat and gazed open-mouthed at his sister-in-law.

"Ah, you may well look like that with a naughty, guilty conscience. But seriously, it can't go on. It's not fair to the girl herself, to Miss Wenderby."

"Oh — Miss *Wenderby*?"

"Of course. Isn't she my little governess?"

"Well, I should say *Mis* Wenderby was five feet seven if she's an inch," said Hugh pleasantly.

"You can hardly call her little, Laura."

"Oh, you know what I mean. She's little in — in position. She's just my child's nursery governess."

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"And — she's fit to be a princess," said Hugh, slowly and thoughtfully.

Mrs. Poppleton felt really inclined to cry. She had sufficient provocation. First one stupid man raving about Diana, full of the most idiotic heroics, and now — another had begun. This one she meant to stop at once — nip all his sentiments in the bud before he could get any farther.

"Anyhow, whether Miss Wenderby is fit for the rank of a princess, and were she six feet in height, I want to ask you, Hugh, as a kindness to, and out of consideration to, me, not to pay Miss Wenderby so much attention. It is simply turning her head, filling her mind with all sorts of nonsensical fancies, and entirely unfitting her for her duties as a nursery governess."

"Nonsensical fancies? What sort? Has she mentioned me to you in — in any way?" Captain Poppleton's whole body vibrated with eagerness as he leant forward in his chair and examined Mrs. Poppleton's face with the eye of a detective, searching and hawk-like. "Has she expressed her feelings for me to you?" he continued breathlessly and not waiting for Mrs. Poppleton to reply, "said whether she liked me or didn't, mentioned whether she admired me or otherwise? But no, she is not that sort of girl. She wouldn't make a

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confidante of you. She does not wear her heart upon her sleeve. Laura, Miss Wenderby is a fine girl, a magnificent creature. I never met her equal. Such fine feelings, such generous emotions, such a sense of humour. Quick-tempered, perhaps, intolerant toward the weak and wobbly ones of this world, but so tender to those who suffer and whose lines are not laid in pleasant places. So gentle and patient with Susie. So full of admiration for everything that's great and noble. Laura, you're a lucky woman to have found Miss Wenderby, and I — am an unlucky devil to have met her . . . God help me ——” The last he muttered beneath his breath, and taking out his handkerchief he wiped his face as he walked up and down the room with long and rapid strides.

Mrs. Poppleton at first simply sat and mutely gazed at him. She could find no words for some considerable time to express what she thought of such an extraordinary outburst, and she quivered with suppressed temper.

Had these two men — her husband and brother-in-law — gone mad about the girl? Had she bewitched them, cast a spell over them, made them see in her a goddess when she was just an ordinary person the same as — as any other

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person? Mrs. Poppleton asked herself. A most ordinary person, with just two eyes, a nose and a mouth, and everyday black hair, and a complexion pale, and to Mrs. Poppleton quite unattractive. What she admired were nice rosy cheeks like her own. It was ridiculous and positively aggravating to hear them both — husband and brother-in-law — echoing each other, repeating almost word for word what the other had said in praise and absurd eulogy of this most ordinary person, her governess.

Mrs. Poppleton felt it wasn't fair to her. They must have been putting their heads together and discussing Diana in private. They had each said she was fine, generous, humorous, quick-tempered, noble, and a lot of other (with the exception of quick-tempered) rubbish. Each could not have evolved such rubbish off his own bat. For some reason, best known to themselves — perhaps just to annoy Mrs. Poppleton — they had arranged to take this girl up, extend their patronage to her, and they would see they had made a mistake. She would have no goddesses about her house. No eighth wonder of the world should remain sleeping under her roof. Diana should go. Mrs. Poppleton, because of her temper, because of her jealousy, because of her

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vexation with these two fools of men, forgot at the moment what Diana's going would mean to her; the inconvenience of it, to put it in its mildest form. Her reason was blinded by passion.

"Hugh," she said, and now her manner was that of magnificent patience, "I refuse to discuss Miss Wenderby further. I did not come to this room to talk to you of her virtues. I have neither the time nor the inclination. I came to request you to desist from paying Miss Wenderby so much attention for the short time she remains under my roof — and my request, as our royalty puts it, is in reality a command." She tried to be playful over the last bit of her sentence, because Hugh had stopped walking about the room and now stood to his full height in front of her — a height towering above her; and it is difficult to retain one's dignity toward a thing up in the air above you, when it should in reality be down at your feet.

"For the short time Miss Wenderby remains under your roof — what do you mean?"

Perhaps Hugh adopted this tone when he was drilling his men under a burning Indian sun, or whatever he did to his men, Mrs. Poppleton told herself, and she refused to get frightened,



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but her voice was a little shaky as she said, "I have decided not to keep Miss Wenderby."

"Is that on account of me?"

"Partly."

"Then I will go." He walked toward the door as though to put his intention into immediate action, and Mrs. Poppleton gave a faint scream.

"Hugh!" she cried, "stop!"

She was in a dilemma now. What should she do? Hugh's whole bearing expressed that he meant what he said. If Diana went, he went. They might even go *together*. Mrs. Poppleton felt they were quite capable of it. Go hand in hand, so to speak, from under her very nose. And if Diana went, what would her husband say? And if Hugh went, still more what would he say? Mrs. Poppleton trembled at the very thought. There were occasions upon which she stood in fear of Mr. Poppleton. This would be one of them.

"Hugh," she asked a little quaveringly, "where were you going?" She smiled as she put the question, trying to gain time and arrange what she should do.

"I was going to pack up and leave this house." He returned to the hearth and again looked down on her. She wished he would resume his seat.

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She felt unequal to standing herself, she had passed an unnerving morning, and a sitting person is at a disadvantage, especially when the one who is standing is over six feet high in his stockings.

"But why?"

"Miss Wenderby shall not be driven away through me. I would sooner cut off my right hand."

Captain Poppleton looked very handsome and brave as he pronounced these words, very fearless and heroic. Mrs. Poppleton found herself thinking what an attractive lover he would make, and she wondered he had not been "caught." She had not yet met the man (with the exception of Mr. Poppleton) whom she believed had fallen in love of his own initiative, and not been "caught" by some designing female.

"But she is not being driven away, as you term it. I have not yet given her notice, but I am thinking of it. Her conduct toward you I consider has been indiscreet and immodest. I don't say it is all her fault, for you have given her encouragement, treated her too much as an equal ——"

"Never," he interrupted, "for I consider her infinitely above me." There was a weariness in his voice, a humility, which startled Mrs.

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Poppleton. Could he be genuinely in love with Miss Wenderby?

"I have never treated her as an equal. I have too much respect for her — I am a bad lot myself, you know." He laughed now, nervously, apologetically, and without mirth. "Look here, Laura" — to her relief he sat down in the armchair and their faces were again on a level — "what do you want — exactly? As long as I am in the same house as Miss Wenderby I cannot help speaking to her. It is impossible. We have been such good — friends. I could not suddenly change in my manner to her. Could I?"

"I don't see the difficulty," replied Mrs. Poppleton, "and it need not be sudden. It could be gradual."

"And what would Miss Wenderby think?" His face was depressed, his gay blue eyes were full of trouble.

"Of course if you have gone to such lengths with Miss Wenderby that what she thinks is of importance, I have nothing further to say." Mrs. Poppleton perceived, and she was remarkably quick to discover when an enemy was at a disadvantage, that for some reason she was getting the upper hand of Hugh. At first he had taken high ground. Now he was beginning to parley with her.

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He did not speak, and walked to the window, resting his elbows on the ledge, his back to the room.

"Of course, I repeat, if you have led Miss Wenderby to understand that you intend asking her to be your wife ——"

"I can never do that," he cried, darting round. "It is impossible. I'm not quite such a ——" His voice fell on the last word. Mrs. Poppleton could not catch it; she imagined it might be "fool." "Laura, say no more. Tell me what you want me to do, or not to do. I'll promise anything. . . ." The perspiration stood out on his forehead though the day was cold, his face was white. "I'll promise anything in reason so long as you won't send that girl away. It would be too hard, too unkind to her. I'll go myself. I'll leave to-morrow."

"But that's what I can't and won't allow. Chris would never hear of such a thing. You are *not* to go. We enjoy having you here — we're all so fond of you." And this was genuine. Mrs. Poppleton had grown really attached to this romantic, good-looking brother-in-law. He had brought an atmosphere of gaiety to the house very pleasant and stimulating, and Mrs. Poppleton liked him better than ever, now that he was

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willing to climb down and be amenable to her suggestions of reformed conduct.

"I don't want you to do anything very hard or difficult," she said playfully. Had he not said or implied that he would never marry Miss Wenderby? Had he not suggested that though he admired her greatly, the last idea in his mind would be to make her Mrs. Hugh Poppleton? Mrs. Poppleton could afford to be nice and kind and generous. She felt safe. The reputation of her husband's family was safe. There would be no *mésalliance*. Hugh was too sensible to do anything foolish.

"I only want you to be more circumspect in your attitude toward my governess. Talk to her less. Pay her less attention. Cease to go for walks with her unless Susie is with you, and, even then, less frequently. Abstain from giving her flowers — carnations at this time of the year" — again the playful manner — "are expensive."

Hugh could not suppress a start.

"Did *she* tell you about the carnations?" And then he reproached himself for his suspicion. Diana tell this woman any of her private affairs? The thing was impossible. Mrs. Poppleton must have been prying about Diana's bedroom. D —

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her! He felt he hated her at this moment. Again he stalked across the room and stared through the window with unseeing eyes.

"No, it was Susie. She told me this morning. She said how kind you had been to Miss Wenderby. She is very fond of her governess, you know."

"Sensible kid," he observed drily, without looking round.

Mrs. Poppleton rose. Her presence she felt was required in another quarter of the house. Mrs. Faggott would be wondering what there was to be for lunch.

"Anyhow, you agree to observe my wishes, Hugh? I don't think they're unreasonable. I hate to appear to be dictating to a guest, but I am sure you will see my point. A governess *must* be kept in her proper place. . . ."

She lingered with her hand on the door.

"All right." Still he did not turn his head, and his voice was toneless.

Mrs. Poppleton left him.

## CHAPTER XIV

And Diana! Was she distressed at the change in Captain Poppleton? Was she unhappy? Did she imagine he was tired of her? Not a bit of it.

To Diana had been given an understanding of men denied to many women. Mrs. Poppleton, for example, no more understood the mind of her husband or that of any other man than she understood the evolution of a species through natural selection.

Diana was as happy as ever.

She knew that "something had happened." One day Captain Poppleton devoted himself to her with passionate abandonment. The next he addressed her in cold, disjointed sentences, whilst looking at her with hungry eyes.

The cold, disjointed sentences didn't matter, so long as he continued to look at her like that.

And Diana guessed who had been the disturbing element, who had been "at him." Indeed she

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wondered that they had been left in peace to enjoy each other's society for so long.

And she was content to wait.

She believed that Hugh Poppleton loved her. At first she had whispered the words to herself tremulously and only half believing. Now she believed it to the very innermost end of her being. He loved her. He loved her. And she loved him.

And if he had not declared himself, told her he loved her in so many words, asked her to be his wife, there was some good reason for his waiting, for his restraint. And she was content to wait.

Perhaps he thought it wise to defer speaking to her till his visit was at an end. Perhaps he guessed there would be trouble with his brother's wife. But whatever his motive for keeping silent, Diana trusted him implicitly.

Now, it almost amused her to see his efforts to be cool and distant to her. They were so manifestly forced and unnatural. They wouldn't have deceived a blind elephant. And many a time she was forced to drop her eyelids, when he made some gauche and almost rude observation to her in the presence of Mrs. Poppleton, to veil the laughter in her eyes. Men were such poor actors. He carried out the part allotted to him by his sister-in-law so badly, Diana wondered that



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it met with Mrs. Poppleton's satisfaction and approval. She did not know that her employer was filled with a sense of security after hearing the cry which had been wrung from him of: "I cannot marry her." Mrs. Poppleton didn't stop to inquire why he couldn't marry Miss Wenderby. Whether it was because he recognized the difference in their social position, or whether it might be that he was already affianced to somebody else. It was sufficient for her that he had made this comforting and reassuring statement, and that there had been bitterness and regret in his voice she had not noticed.

Diana said little of Captain Poppleton these days in her letters to Tommie. The happier she grew herself, the sorrier she felt for her old friend. Yet she wanted to tell him everything as of old. Without his sympathy she felt lonesome, and that *he* was shut out in the cold. The thought of his being out there alone in the cold, with nothing at which to warm his starved heart, filled her with a deep sorrow and regret.

One day she started to dissect the characters of the two men who loved her. It was an unwise thing to do. She stopped after a little while startled, almost dismayed. Why, Tommie was the finer right through, yet she loved Hugh

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Poppleton. Diana had not yet arrived at the simple, elemental fact that you love or you don't love. Why one loves it is impossible to explain, it is indefinable. So she was wise to desist from her analysis. It would have helped neither Tommie, Hugh Poppleton, nor herself.

"Whether he's fine or isn't fine, whether he's noble or isn't noble, he's just perfectly charming," she said aloud to her reflection one day in the mirror. "Do you hear that, Diana Wenderby? He's charming and adorable, and far too good for you, you sanctimonious, fault-finding wretch. Your complaint against Tommie was that he was too frightfully nice, and that you couldn't live up to him. And now that you have something more human you are not satisfied." But she was really.

She was surprised one day to receive a letter from Tommie bearing a foreign postmark.

"I suddenly felt," he wrote, "that I must chuck everything and have a thorough change if I wished to preserve my reason.

"The old man was difficult at first, but — well, here I am.

"Do you remember reading with me Belloc's 'Path to Rome'? Here I am on the veritable path — a tramp indeed: A knapsack over my

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shoulder, a slouch hat, big boots; above my head the sky and the sun. Diana, this Italian sun in January is a revelation of what sun can be when it likes, and along my path the chiffchaffs sing.

"The vineyards, all cut in terraces on the sides of the hills, are, of course, bare as yet. But my imagination sees them, in a tender mist of green, a mist delicate and wonderful, creeping along the valleys and up the mountains, weaving its way in and out of the gray-green of the olives. And the olives? I hear your question. Yes, I admit it; disappointing in the beginning. The first two days of my tramp were gray — and the olives too were gray, and my mood was gray. And then the sun came out, and the sky was blue, of the intense blue of Southern Europe, and, lo and behold, the olives against this blue had become of a magical and most haunting green beauty. They got into my head, into my blood, into my dreams, because of their sorrowfulness. I had always known that a birch was the gayest of trees, a poplar the most restless, an aspen the most sensitive, an elm the proudest and most aloof, a beech the tenderest, but never before had I met one so sorrowful. At once we were in sympathy. I do not profess to be a happy man.

"But each day my heart lightens, because the Italian sun is overhead, and Rome is before me.

"I sleep at wayside inns, and, like Belloc, drink the *vin-du-pays*. A most heartsome wine indeed. To-day Asti has washed down my frugal

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lunch, a nectar for the gods, sparkling light, and  
tasting of grapes hot in the sun.

"I have a couple of books with me. What do  
you think of these lines?

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles  
made;

Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes drop-  
ping slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the  
cricket sings

There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake-water lapping with low sounds by the  
shore,

While I stand on the roadway — or on the pavements  
gray,

I hear it in the deep heart's core.

"Isn't there a lilt about them? I hum them as  
I walk along. Here there are many bean-rows,  
and the young beans are already pushing their way  
through the ground. I wish it were March that  
their flowers could sweeten the way. Some day  
I shall arise me and go to Innisfree and nine bean-  
rows will be mine and a hive for the honey-bee!  
Don't you envy me?

"But of one thing I feel uncertain — will peace

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come dropping slow? I wonder! If it doesn't, my scheme of life will be thrown away. As well, and better, live in a city as in a bee-loud glade without contentment.

"I expect to be away a couple of months, and many and divers places I hope to visit, and a true relation of my experiences I will send you from time to time.

"May the gods give you all good things.

"TOMMIE."

And Diana's only sensation when she had finished this letter was one of resentment that Tommie should be having all these experiences without her. She felt indeed quite neglected.

## CHAPTER XV

The "treasures" had arrived, and swept so clean (even under the mats) that Mrs. Poppleton felt impelled to give a dinner party. This impulse overtook her once a year, and once a year Mr. Poppleton suffered more than usual.

"Unless one entertains, one cannot expect to be entertained," said she oracularly, producing paper and pencil in readiness to make a list of the honoured guests who were to be summoned to the feast.

"But that is what we desire," said her husband, looking askance at the writing materials in her hand. Mrs. Poppleton would never make her list without him, though she disputed every one of his suggestions. The afternoon was fine, there would be just time for a walk to the Old Mill before tea, and Mr. Poppleton hankered after an hour or two's companionship with his little daughter.

"Couldn't you manage without me?" he asked tentatively, his eye on the door. "You know the Bogmere people much better than I."

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"No," replied Mrs. Poppleton, "I want your assistance, please. I don't *often* ask you to do anything for me, Chris."

This was not true. Mrs. Poppleton frequently requested her husband to do many things for her, from bringing tomatoes and Buzzard's cake from town, to fixing a draught-proof contrivance along the edge of the nursery door.

He sat down with a suppressed sigh, his hands in his rough tweed pockets, his thick boots on the polished fender, which caused Mrs. Poppleton to squirm at their every movement. Had she dared she would have lifted his feet and placed them on a newspaper, the same as she had Diana's.

The fire was dull, economically backed up with coke and slack, and the room was cold. Mr. Poppleton longed to insert the thin curate poker between the second and third bars of the grate and make a cheerful blaze, but he dared not.

Mrs. Poppleton had her "At Home" book of visitors in her hand, and carefully she ran her eyes over its pages.

"Atkinsons, Bells, Browns, Chalmers, none of these ——"

"Why not the Chalmers?" interrupted Mr. Poppleton. Mrs. Poppleton was wearing pince-nez. She was obliged to do so when reading,

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writing, and sewing. They were balanced at the end of her long, well-shaped nose, and she now looked over the top of them at her husband in surprise. When she did this, Diana was invariably reminded of a perplexed sheep.

"I—I like the Chalmers," said Mr. Poppleton, shuffling beneath her gaze.

"When the Chalmers come to us," said Mrs. Poppleton with decision, "it will be to sandwiches and lemonade. They are not dinner people."

"What do you mean by dinner people?"

"When we went to an evening at the Chalmers' we had only the lightest of refreshments, in fact one kind of sandwich only. They could hardly expect to be invited to an eight-course dinner in return."

Not lightly did Mrs. Poppleton bid her friends to eat turkey with her at one and two a pound.

"But why not?" Mr. Poppleton's lip set ominously, but Mrs. Poppleton did not or would not see it. She perused her list carefully.

"Why not?" repeated Mr. Poppleton. "Do you mean you will only ask people to dinner who are in a position to return the same hospitality? Pah! The people I would have are those who are poor and not 'smart,' and who are accustomed to boiled mutton and milk pudding for their daily



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fare — people like Mr. and Mrs. Chalmer, who are nice and refined and good, with cultured tastes, and who gave us of their best when we went to them. Not the rich, self-satisfied, selfish members of society who will entertain you if you can entertain them back; who ask you to their shooting parties if you can return the compliment, who offer you Pommery Sec if your own wine cellars are full. The ones to whom I would like to give champagne are those who can only afford to drink Australian burgundy — the poor, struggling, hard-working men and women of the world.” He rose and seemed to dominate the room with his big, angry, burly person, and eyes flashing fires of indignation. But Mrs. Poppleton was in no way moved. She had frequently seen Chris worked up in a similar fashion, and usually about something quite trifling. She had not the faintest intention of sending Mr. and Mrs. Chalmer an invitation to her dinner party, not if he talked till Doomsday.

There were so many friends who *must* be asked — the new people at the Hall at Windlesham End, who had made a fortune out of pills. Why, Mr. Westingale might some day buy a picture of her husband’s. Then there were the Marriotts, who were related, certainly distantly, but still

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related, to a peer of the realm; and the Peabodys — retired naval people, quite poor, yes, “but the Navy always tells,” Mrs. Poppleton had been wont to say, and when her husband asked “how?” she looked vague and murmured, “Oh, you know.” But Mr. Poppleton didn’t know. What he did know was that Commander Peabody was an odious snob.

And to-day he also knew that these “infernal Peabodys” would be invited to the dinner party as certainly as he knew that the Chalmers wouldn’t be invited. So why kick about it?

But he did kick. He kicked his big body round the room for some minutes while Mrs. Poppleton continued to study her book carefully. Then he said “May I go?”

“Go? We have only just begun.” Her tone of gentle patience, her whole attitude of forbearance, so worked upon poor Mr. Poppleton’s nerves that he emitted a sound, a cross between a curse and a moan as he struggled after composure.

“Laura,” he cried, “if I stayed here till the last day we should never finish as far as I am concerned. The people I would like to invite to my house you don’t want. So there it is. Your asking for my opinion on the subject at all

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is merely a farce, and you know it. So why waste my time and yours? It is your dinner party, not mine. If I thought I could be of any real assistance to you I would willingly stay, but as it is —— ” He crossed the room and laid his hand quite gently on his wife’s shoulder. It was not a caressing hand, but at least it was conciliatory, but she shook it off with a petulant gesture.

“Go,” she said. “Do not stay on *my* account. You never *do* help, so why I should imagine you should suddenly change your mode of life on my account, I cannot think. I am sorry to have already wasted so much of your valuable time.”

She did not jump when Mr. Poppleton banged the door as he left the room, for her nerves were strong, but when, five minutes later, he passed the window hand in hand with Susie and out through the front gate, she left her writing, moved to the window, and watched them till they were out of sight. Then, laying her much becurled head against the window frame. she burst into tears.

And pity her a little. The Mrs. Poppletons of this world need our pity and compassion more than our derision. They are dwarfed morally. They have a kink somewhere. Perhaps they

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have allowed themselves to shrink without making any effort to check it. Allowed their tongues to become bitter and their thoughts to become mean, and their hearts to become hard. But all the more they need our pity. The beauty of life is not for them, nor the beauty of love which means sacrifice and giving one's self to others. Some people take all, and give nothing. We do not love those people, but they need our compassion.

Mrs. Poppleton sobbed noiselessly, heartbrokenly for some minutes. She was filled with a deep pity for herself. Her husband was always hard on her, always misunderstood her. Why, why had he married her? She, now, had begun to ask this question as well as poor Mr. Poppleton. And when a woman begins to put such a question to herself things are bad with her indeed.

But she could not afford to waste her time in this fashion. There were all the invitations to write out and the afternoon was waning. Mrs. Poppleton went upstairs to her room, bathed her eyes, powdered her nose, returned to the dining-room and summoned Diana to her aid.

"I am going to give a dinner party and I shall be glad of your assistance with the notes of invitation," she said, motioning Diana to a chair.

"With pleasure." Diana noticed that Mrs.

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Poppleton had been weeping, and that her breath still came in little catches. She wondered what was the fresh trouble. "A dinner party sounds quite exciting," she added cheerfully. "It won't be," said Mrs. Poppleton dismally. "I am only giving it from a sense of duty. Here is a list of the guests to be invited. *You* will be present, and Mr. Green will take you in."

"Not the little rabbit-mouthed curate?" ejaculated Diana in dismay.

Mrs. Poppleton regarded her governess over the top of her pince-nez with severe eye.

"I object to your speaking of a clergyman of the Church of England in such a disrespectful manner," she said. "I only suggested your coming in from kindness. Of course if you don't wish to sit among my guests —"

"I don't," said Diana politely but firmly, "not if I have to sit next to Mr. Green; I should only be uncomfortable with him, for I might laugh."

Mrs. Poppleton picked up a pen and drew down the corners of her mouth. "Very well," she said, "we will say no more for the present. Time is passing; I wish these invitations to go to-day. A fortnight's clear invitation should be given for a dinner party of eight courses." She wished her governess was less plain-spoken.

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"Eight courses!" repeated Diana in an awed voice. And she was awed. She knew that those eight courses would be discussed, worn threadbare, reduced to stalks and shreds, digested, so to speak, before one had been partaken.

"Yes," said Mrs. Poppleton, in the careless manner of one who flings dinner parties broadcast at the heads of her friends and acquaintances, with a French chef in the kitchen, and butlers and footmen strewn about the hall and stairs. But she did not stop to give Diana particulars of her proposed menu, though every item of food was already arranged — she had taken three cookery books with her to bed on the previous night. A girl who refused to go into dinner with a respected clergyman did not deserve to receive confidences. Mrs. Poppleton could show restraint when she liked. Their pens scratched along Mrs. Poppleton's best cream-laid, rough-edged paper, their heads were bent over their work, their tongues were silent. Soon eight neat notes lay ready on the table. "I see you have sent one to Mr. Green," Diana observed. It lay conspicuously at the top.

"Yes. I feel sure you will think better of the position you have taken up when the night

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arrives, and will realize the privilege which is being offered you."

"Do you mean Mr. Green by a privilege?"

"I do."

Diana could not help laughing. It was such a new way of looking at poor, little Mr. Green.

Hugh Poppleton entered the room at the moment. "What's the joke?" he asked. He had forgotten he was being distant toward Diana. It had begun to rain and he was dull and bored, and had been wondering where Diana had secreted herself all the afternoon.

"Miss Wenderby is laughing because it amuses her to refuse to go into dinner with an honoured guest of mine," explained Mrs. Poppleton, with immense dignity. "She imagines it to be a funny situation."

"It would be if I accepted the guest as a dinner partner," said Diana, still laughing. She had long ceased to regard her employer with any feeling of fear. To live at all with Mrs. Poppleton meant that one must not take her seriously. And this is where poor Mr. Poppleton had failed. He had taken his wife too seriously.

"Who's the man and where's the dinner?" Captain Poppleton seated himself on the edge of the table and prepared to be amused. His

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sister-in-law and Diana, when engaged in a skirmish, always entertained him.

"The dinner is to be here in a fortnight's time — in this very room. The man is the Reverend Marmaduke Green."

"Not the little rabbit-mouthed chap who reads the lessons!"

"The very man," said Diana. "Those were just my words."

Mrs. Poppleton got up from her chair. They were both laughing now, and apparently could not help it. Diana made a great effort to check hers, but Mrs. Poppleton's face set her off again.

"Of course if he had worn a plate in his youth, it might have been possible for Miss Wenderby to consider the proposition," said Hugh gravely; "his teeth might then have been straight." His eyes were still twinkling with mirth.

Diana frowned at him to be quiet. Mrs. Poppleton was becoming seriously annoyed and was beginning to move toward the door. When Mrs. Poppleton moved toward doors with that undulating, silent motion, all onlookers, though perhaps not actually frightened, became uneasy and anxious. Diana felt suddenly desirous that her employer should cease moving, should in fact stand still. Also it had come to her that



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Captain Poppleton would be present at the dinner party. Better be there even with Mr. Green than up in the nursery alone.

But how could she climb down, give in to Mrs. Poppleton without a loss of pride? She looked appealingly at the back view of her employer, who was now at the door. If only the figure would stop. But it didn't. It passed through and closed the door gently but securely behind it.

"If she wouldn't always go, disappear," breathed Diana, "it's so disconcerting. It puts one at such a disadvantage. One can never finish an argument or get the better of her."

"I don't think you should have refused to go in with Mr. Green," said Captain Poppleton by way of reply. The prospect of a long drawn-out dinner without Diana at the table depressed his spirits.

"Really?"

"No, I don't. It's unkind to my sister-in-law."

"Really!" she repeated again, amusement in her eyes.

He got off the table and joined her in the window. "Should you mind, should you object to going in with me?" His head was bent toward her, his eyes swept her face.

"Well, the position would certainly be more

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supportable. But Mrs. Poppleton would never entertain it. You are to take in a Miss Robin, an heiress; she's forty or thereabouts, but young for her years."

"I'll see Miss Robin d — at Jericho first," he said with irritation.

"Besides," said Diana demurely, "you must not forget that your attitude toward me at present is one of severe aloofness."

"And it's so difficult to keep up," he groaned.

She laughed at his admittance of the part he was supposed to be playing. He was not clever, and she liked him for it.

"Why do you do as your sister-in-law tells you?" she asked with sudden courage.

"Because she threatened to send you away."

"Oh!" said Diana, and then added, "Indeed?"

"I feel the most awful coward," he said. "I could kick myself, but I felt I couldn't do without you and . . . there are reasons . . . I — "

"Don't try to explain," said Diana gently. "I am sure there are." She looked at him fearlessly, trustfully, and as his eyes met hers his own dropped whilst the crimson deepened in his face tanned by the Indian sun. "I — Diana" — again he used her Christian name and she did not

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object — “I am not happy. I wish I could tell you something. You are so generous — I believe you would understand and help me. “But ——” He stood swaying as though torn by indecision, his voice hoarse with emotion.

She looked at him in surprise, but still trustfully.

“Whatever your trouble is, I will help you if I can,” she said simply.

“Thank you,” and he made as though to take her hands, but something in her attitude as she stood straight and slim before him caused him to pause.

He leant against the window and looked down at her upturned face and into her grave eyes long and wistfully, and a great sigh escaped him.

“What a friend you are,” he said at length.

Tommie had once used the same words to her, and she coloured at the remembrance, whilst a shadow crept across her face. Tommie was away in Italy — alone. Tramping along the path (with no companions but a couple of books), to Rome, while another man made love to her.

With the keen, swift observation of a lover Captain Poppleton detected the shadow.

“What is the matter? Why did you suddenly look sad?” he asked.

“Did I? How quick you are.”

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"Yes. Can you tell me of what you were thinking? If it is not impertinent to put such a question."

"I was thinking of my friend Tommie Sutherland." A tender smile curved her lips.

Captain Poppleton started. The reply was so unexpected. With difficulty he checked a bad word.

"He is in Italy on a walking tour," continued Diana evenly. "He writes delightfully of his experiences. I have had two or three letters. They make me long to see what he is seeing."

"Indeed!" Hugh Poppleton's voice was dry. Then he thrust his hands into his pockets and whistled, or tried to whistle, cheerfully, but it nearer resembled the note of a Jew's-harp as interpreted by an "Out-of-work" on a day of wet November.

Diana was amused, but kept her mouth grave. "That is not exhilarating," she observed, "and the afternoon is depressing."

He laughed and withdrew his hands from his pockets.

"Look here," he said, and he shrugged his fine shoulders with a gesture as of casting from them some weight, some responsibility, which was more than he could manage, or could any longer

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undertake. "Don't refuse to be present at this dinner party, will you? You shan't go in with little Green, I promise you. It'll be too infernally slow as it is, and if you're not there —— ' His ardent eyes expressed the rest.

"But —— "

"Oh, don't say 'but.' Don't argue please. I hear my blessed sister-in-law's footsteps. Just promise — be quick." He stood before her compellingly, not-to-be-resisted.

And she promised.

## CHAPTER XVI

It was the night of Mrs. Poppleton's dinner party. A smell of ox-tail soup, roast turkey, and sausages pervaded the house.

Every now and again Mr. Poppleton wandered down a passage and opened a side door to expel the odour into the night, and as promptly Mrs. Poppleton shut it again. The child would catch a chill — the child having been allowed to stay up till the last minute to view the table, and watch Miss Wenderby worm a slippery brown dinner roll into a snug fold of each table napkin.

The entire household would send up devout thanksgiving and praise when this night was wiped from the calendar. For all had suffered during the fortnight, some more, some less, Mrs. Poppleton perhaps most of all. Her days had been troubled by the thought of what was before her. Her sleep had been broken by dreams of burnt sausages, underdone turkey, and of lemon whip that refused to sit up and be frothy and light-hearted after the manner of properly constituted

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lemon whip, but collapsing into thin, pale fluid as it was being offered to Commander Peabody.

"We had better go and dress," said she to Diana, whilst giving the rows of shining knives and forks and sparkling wine glasses a last lingering survey. "It all looks very nice, and no one will notice that Mr. Poppleton and I are using dessert knives and forks for fish. Do you think they will?"

"I don't see that it matters if they do," replied Diana a little wearily. They had already worn the subject of substituting the dessert knives and forks for fish ones, being short of two pairs of the latter, threadbare. "If you used chopsticks for turbot I can't see that it matters, so long as it conveyed the fish to your mouth."

Mrs. Poppleton, fortunately for Diana, did not hear the latter part of her sentence; she had just made the disturbing discovery that a menu holder, becoming entangled in a trail of smilax, had fallen on its side. With patience she persuaded it to stand up. Then she said: "Come, we have only three quarters of an hour and the BogmERE people are punctual."

Diana followed her out of the room and up the stairs. On the landing Mrs. Poppleton paused. "Thank you," she said, "for helping me so

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much. I am much obliged. *I* should never have thought of stuffing the turkey with chestnuts. It will be a novelty here. I am glad you have thought better of your refusal to be present to-night. Mr. Green is *quite* nice, and his mother was a ffoliott — two small f's, you know. But one thing let me warn you against, don't get on the subject of the Church. I somehow imagine you have had a bringing up with relation to our Church of an Evangelical tendency. Mr. Green would be extremely ritualistic if our dear vicar permitted it."

"Very well," agreed Diana with a smile, as she passed into her room, "I will not tread on any of Mr. Green's corns . . . I shan't get the opportunity," she added *sotto voce*, as she closed the door.

Let the Poppleton household be described as later it assembled in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Poppleton was the first down, and Mr. Poppleton's predominating feeling on catching sight of his wife on entering the room was that of surprise at her proportions. O. S. she indeed looked to-night in a low-cut, rose-du-Barri satin gown, a gown very tight in the waist and revealing a large expanse of white neck and arms.

"How do you think I look?" she asked, turning



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slowly round like a manœuvring battleship for her husband's inspection.

It was an unwise question to put to a man who was bored at what was before him, cross after a fray with a refractory white tie, uncomfortable in a highly stiffened shirt front, and tired after a week's hard work. Besides, Mr. Poppleton being an artist in every sense of the word, admired loose, straight flowing effects in a woman's dress, not pronounced waist-lines and innumerable frills and furbelows. He also liked dull, subdued colours on people no longer slim, certainly not bright rose and of such a shiny texture as duchesse satin. So, for an instant he closed his eyes (when she had manœuvred round with her back to him) with a faint shudder. But he had opened them again by the time she was facing him, and managed to smile upon her and make her happy. What mattered the perjury of his own soul if, with a "little lie," as Diana put it, he could keep the peace.

Hugh came in next, handsome, gay, and faultlessly dressed. His fair hair and boots seemed to be rivalling one another in shininess. He took up his position by his brother on the hearthrug, and, as was her custom, Mrs. Poppleton fell to comparing the two as they

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stood together, and certainly not to the advantage of her husband.

Diana was late. Mrs. Poppleton glanced at the cupid clock. Only five minutes from the half hour. It was unseemly that a governess should be the last to appear — make an entrance before an audience. A properly constituted governess should have been down first, swept up the hearth, raised the lights, put a crooked blind straight, and then taken a seat in an obscure corner of the room.

Hugh, too, was looking at the clock and watching the door as anxiously as Mrs. Poppleton. Had Diana suddenly changed her mind and decided not to do that which he had arranged she should do — in conjunction with him? Had she failed him? Hugh didn't know Diana if such a suspicion could arise in his mind. Diana didn't fail people. He smiled as he kept his eyes on the door. In a quarter of an hour's time his sister-in-law would receive one of the biggest shocks of her life. He smiled in anticipation.

The clock chimed the half hour.

"I wonder what's become of Miss Wenderby," said Mrs. Poppleton, and as she uttered the words the door opened and Diana entered.

And what a lovely Diana! Even Mrs. Popple-

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ton drew her breath sharply as the girl trailed down the room and seated herself in an inconspicuous place by the window. Her gown was of the softest shade of primrose satin, exquisitely made, and clinging to the lithe, graceful figure in beautiful harmonious folds. A gown that had been fashioned by a dressmaker, not necessarily expensive, but one who knew her art. It had been made a few months back, perhaps a year, for a dance at Aunt Ponsonby's, when money was still plentiful. She wore no jewellery, but a single yellow rose placed just above the left ear against the small dark head was daring, but, as Hugh said to himself, just perfect in its effect.

He could not take his eyes from her, and his heart beat tumultuously as he gazed at the rose which made such a setting to the beautiful uncommon face. He had given her that rose, had raked London over to procure it. He had overheard her tell Susie that her gown for the dinner party was to be yellow. And she was wearing it in her hair, his rose.

Mrs. Poppleton was gazing at it too, and almost rudely. She was not debating where it came from, for she instinctively knew, in spite of Hugh's promises to be less attentive to Miss Wenderby. What she was debating was whether a red rose

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placed in a similar position above her own left ear would be as becoming to her as it was to her governess.

Mr. Poppleton also was staring at Diana, simply because he was an artist, and couldn't help it.

And was Diana aware of their scrutiny? For her head was bent and her eyes were on the floor, eyes so full of laughter and wickedness that had Tommie been there and looked into them he would have bet his bottom dollar that mischief was brewing. This was the expression they always wore when she was meditating wickedness.

No, she was not aware of the attention she was receiving, the whole of her energies being devoted to keeping her mischievous eyes and lips in order. Mrs. Poppleton's suspicions must not be aroused.

There was a ring at the front door bell, footsteps in the hall, and Mrs. Poppleton stood to attention with a welcoming smile for Mr. and Mrs. Westingale when they were announced by the hired waitress.

They were shortly followed by the Peabodys, and soon all the guests — including Miss Robin, a coquettish lady in white with blue bows, and Mr. Green — were assembled.

Smilingly Mrs. Poppleton whispered to each

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gentleman the name of his dinner partner, and presented Mr. Green to Diana. Then there was a little pause, the sort of expectant hush that invariably falls upon people when waiting for their dinner.

Mrs. Poppleton looked anxiously at the door. She was not good at keeping the ball of conversation rolling, and in this respect Diana excelled. Mr. Poppleton was never of any use in bridging over awkward gaps. Indeed, at the moment, he was gloomily regarding Mrs. Westingale and wondering what on earth he should talk to her about at dinner. She was a depressed woman, and suffered from asthma. He was not even being permitted to carve the turkey, which would have been a little relaxation from Mrs. Westingale, as he did in days gone by. Turkeys were dissected on sideboards now.

Mrs. Poppleton looked appealingly at Diana. But the girl stood silently by Mr. Green and her eyes were still on the floor. Why was Diana so suddenly modest and meek? Mrs. Poppleton conjectured. She was unfamiliar in this new rôle.

Hugh, too, was not helpful, neither was he making any attempt to be polite to Miss Robin; in fact he was walking away from her on the pre-

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tence of opening the window near to Diana, which didn't require opening.

Mrs. Poppleton clutched at her rose-coloured bodice and had visions of the ox-tail soup having fallen into the fire. In another moment she felt she should scream. . . .

But now the waitress was here. Dinner was served.

Mr. Poppleton offered a limp and depressed arm to Mrs. Westingale and disappeared across the hall, followed by four other more or less ill-assorted couples. Mrs. Poppleton watched them approvingly. Now it was Mr. Green's and Miss Wenderby's turn. The small arm of the curate was already invitingly crooked toward Miss Wenderby — when . . . but what was this? . . . Captain Poppleton had inserted himself between Miss Wenderby and the crook, offered his own arm, and was rapidly marching her out of the room.

"Stop!" called Mrs. Poppleton. "Hugh, you have made a mistake. Stop!"

But he apparently did not hear. Holding Diana's arm tightly, as though he feared she might escape him, he vanished.

Mrs. Poppleton, in the first wild moment, was for running after them; so was poor little Mr.

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Green. Then Mrs. Poppleton recovered herself quickly. Hugh and Diana would have already taken their places at the table. And she was well aware that they were both capable of causing unpleasantness, not to say a scene, if she attempted to dislodge them.

"I made a mistake," she said with a smile, though her breath was coming labouredly; "Mr. Green, will you kindly take in Miss Robin? Miss Robin knows some of your relations, the ffolietts. She comes from your part of the world. Now Mr. Westingale. Sorry, Miss Robin, I'm afraid I trod on your charming train, but I've done no damage, I think. *Allons!*" She pluckily stuck to her smile, but as she took her place at the end of the long table she decided to send Diana away the following morning. Her heart was full of wrath toward her, and in a lesser degree toward Hugh. That she could have been tricked like this, hoodwinked, fooled! Her cheeks burnt with temper at the outrage perpetrated upon her — the mistress of the house — by a subordinate. She admitted that Diana had stated distinctly that she should *not* go in to dinner with Mr. Green, and Diana generally did what she said. Still, when Hugh came to her and informed her that Miss Wenderby had changed her mind and

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would be present at the dinner if the invitation still remained open to her, she naturally thought — and anybody would have taken the same view of the case — that Diana had become amenable in every sense of the word. And all the time she was planning this deep-laid scheme of deceit. Not for one moment would Mrs. Poppleton allow herself to believe that her brother-in-law had been the instigator. “The woman tempted me” was as true to-day as in the time of Adam. The woman *always* tempted. And the woman should go. Should be out of Bogmere before the sun again set. Mrs. Poppleton’s breath, vigorously expelled, met a mouthful of soup, and she choked violently.



## CHAPTER XVII

And if poor Mrs. Poppleton didn't enjoy her own dinner party, two persons certainly did; and later, in looking back to that night, Diana, and always with a stab of pain, marvelled that she ever could have been so absolutely happy.

It was characteristic of her, as it has been said before, that once embarked upon a thing she went through with it thoroughly. No thought of Mrs. Poppleton would she permit to disturb her pleasure this evening. Her gay laughter, and then Hugh's, came to Mrs. Poppleton down the table. Above the hum of conversation she could catch a word or two of what they were saying. Hugh was apparently doing most of the talking, his fair head was bent very close to the dark one beside him, and his attention and devotion to Diana left Mrs. Poppleton — sick. Such barefaced flirtation in the presence of ten strangers was simply outrageous. Mrs. Poppleton was surprised at her own self-control in not shrieking out her notice to her governess there and then on the spot. She devoured a great many salted almonds without being

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aware that she had eaten one. What would her guests think of the way in which Diana and Hugh were behaving? Hugh was sitting with his back absolutely square to his other neighbour, and it was Mrs. Peabody. Mrs. Peabody to whom she had said so much of this attractive brother-in-law — “the Navy always being interested in the Army.” Mrs. Poppleton closed her eyes, and for a brief moment shut out the horrid scene. Unwillingly she came back to turbot and Mr. Westingale. The turbot was as sawdust in her dry mouth, and Mr. Westingale’s twice repeated observations that a General Election seemed pending was dull. Mrs. Poppleton resented its dullness. Men were always dull with her. Another laugh came floating down the table — a laugh full of keen enjoyment. Hugh was apparently very amused at something. Diana had the gift of entertaining people.

“Who is that girl at the other end of the table?” Mr. Westingale asked.

“Do you mean my nursery governess?”

“I mean the girl with the yellow rose in her hair.”

“That is my nursery governess.” Mrs. Poppleton’s tone was chilly.

Mr. Westingale was not tactful. He could

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make money out of the spent ends of matches or old postage stamps, his friends were wont to say of him, but he could not make tactful remarks to a woman to save his life.

"You are fortunate," he said, staring hard at Diana; "she is singularly attractive."

Surely Mrs. Poppleton had sufficient provocation to make her cross. Here was another man raving about Diana. She refused the entrée with a viciousness that made the new house-parlour-maid feel it was being handed out of its turn, and, snatching it from Mr. Westingale as he was about to help himself, she bore it away to the sideboard and substituted for it some boned turkey and chestnuts.

"And who is the man?" asked Mr. Westingale when he had recovered from his surprise and disappointment at the loss of the entrée.

"What man?"

"The man with your — governess?"

Mrs. Poppleton informed him briefly. She was tired of Hugh, and she was very tired of Mr. Westingale. He was inquisitive as well as dull.

"Has he known your governess before?"

"Before when?"

"Before they met?"

"He could hardly have done that."

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"I — I mean before your brother-in-law came here on a visit." Mr. Westingale laughed as he put the question. He had discovered, dense though he was, that his hostess was put out about something. The turkey and chestnuts were sufficiently appetizing to make him wishful to appease Mrs. Poppleton. But he was not successful in his efforts. At least not till he had got right away from the subject of Diana and Hugh and — after his third glass of champagne — had hinted delicately that he would like some day to become the purchaser of one of Mr. Poppleton's pictures. Then she thawed a little.

By the time dessert was reached she was almost cheerful. After all, why worry herself so unnecessarily about the behaviour of her governess? This governess would be leaving to-morrow, and before she left Mrs. Poppleton would have had ample opportunity to mention to Miss Wenderby her exact opinion of her. There would be no mincing words on this occasion. She already rolled them as toothsome morsels in her mouth.

As a judge can afford to say kind and encouraging words to a man he is about to condemn to death, so Mrs. Poppleton felt she could afford to smile at Diana as, after catching Mrs. Westingale's eye, she and the other ladies rose from the

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table and filed from the dining to the drawing room. And it was the smile of one who would strike — presently. She felt Diana start beneath it, and she smiled again.

The men had joined the ladies now, and there were three tables of bridge. Diana was sitting out, and there was also a man too many. Mr. Poppleton volunteered to look on, but before he knew where he was he was sitting opposite to Miss Robin as her partner and Hugh was at the piano turning over some leaves of music. Diana did not play, so it did not belong to her; indeed at the moment she was noiselessly putting some coal on the fire. She looked, as she knelt in the firelight, a little sad and tired. That smile on Mrs. Poppleton's face had struck dismay to her heart. Supposing she was to be dismissed! The very thought now sent the blood surging to her cheeks. In her absorption she knelt on after her task was completed. More than one man turned carelessly from his table and looked at her. Whatever she did, or wherever she was, she usually struck the most interesting note in the room. Perhaps it was her intense vitality, her very *aliveness*. Perhaps it was her unconsciousness of self. Hugh left the piano and took a chair in a

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recess by the window. He wanted to watch Diana without being observed by the rest of the room. He was never tired of admiring the poise of the small, dark head, and of enjoying her delicate air of breeding.

Mrs. Poppleton called her to her side, and rising from her chair whispered something to her in a low voice about Susie. As the two stood together Hugh was reminded of a heavy cart horse and a mettlesome, nervous, highly bred hunter — dismayed at nothing, fearing nothing, and always in at the death. A keen observer would have noticed, as he sat there in his darkened corner, that his hands gripped his chair with unnecessary strength, that his lips beneath his moustache were set in a hard straight line, and that his eyes watching Diana had lost their gaiety and were dark and sombre. Again he seemed to be fighting some invisible foe, some dread and deadly enemy. A little vein at the side of his forehead was slightly swollen, drops of perspiration stood on his brow. Fear, fear of something, was written on every line of his face, and still he watched Diana. He watched as though it were for the last time, as though he were saying good-by, as though he would never see her face again. And when she left the room he emitted

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a sharp breath, almost a gasp of relief, and for a moment covered his face with his hands.

Diana went upstairs to see if Susie were asleep. The child had been tired and excited, and a little overcome at being put to bed by Mrs. Faggott. She entered the darkened room noiselessly, but Susie was wide awake.

"Is that you, Angel Pie?" she said fretfully. "I wondered when somebody would come. I *can't* get to sleep. Did all the rolls stay inside the table napkins, or did they tumble out?"

"They all stayed in," replied Diana, laughing. "And why can't you get to sleep?"

"Don't know. Things go round and round in my head. Will you turn up the light? I want to see you in your yellow dress."

Diana did so, and Susie sat up in bed and stared at her governess rapturously.

"You *are* lovely, dear," she said in her old-fashioned way. "You look like a — like one of those yellow lilies, with little black things sticking out, that grow in Mrs. Peabody's garden in the summer."

"Little black things?" echoed Diana.

"Yes, don't you know, that come out of the sort of cup — and your head's like one of them.

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Can't 'splain if you don't know them. And you're wearing Uncle Hugh's rose. I want to smell it, please."

Diana bent down and the child twined her small arms round her neck and laid her cheek against the satin hair. "Don't go yet," she pleaded. "I'm so lonely, and all the lovely smells have come up from the dining-room, and all the laughing and noise, and I thought I could hear you and Uncle Hugh, and I did so want to be there. Will you sit by me, and hold my hand and sing something to me, dear?"

Diana readily assented. She had gone suddenly and strangely tired after the strain and excitement of the dinner, yet, tuned to the highest pitch of sensitiveness, she had the feelings of one who senses a coming storm. There was a foreboding at her heart, she knew not of what, and could not attempt to define even to herself, a sensation of approaching evil. And as an ostrich buries its head in the sand to escape detection of the enemy, she felt she would like to remain hidden in this quiet, peaceful room till her fears were allayed, and pulses and nerves quieter.

With Susie's hand in hers she sat in a low chair by the bed after lowering the light. Her absence would not matter for a little while. They were



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all busy with their bridge in the drawing-room.

"Put your head on the pillow," commanded Susie, "and then I can stroke it while you sing."

More and more did the child love her dear Miss Wenderby, who was never cross and made lessons so attractive, and did such nice, queer, unexpected things, and was always ready to play at lovely make-believe games at a moment's notice.

"But it will crush my rose," demurred Diana. "I'll put my arm round you instead. There! What shall I sing?"

"It's a long time since I pretended to be your own little girl. Sing 'Oh, hush thee, my ba-be.'"

"Oh, hush thee, my ba-be,  
Thy sire was a knight.  
Thy mother a lady,  
Both gentle and bright."

And if her lips twitched at such a description as applied to Mrs. Poppleton, Susie in the dim light could not see them. She had got halfway through the second verse, when through the slightly opened door she heard a footstep come along the landing, pause for an instant and then pass on. Susie heard it too, and before Diana could stop her she

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had called, "Uncle Hugh, Uncle Hugh, come in; you've never said good night. Come back."

The footsteps stopped. There was a brief silence. Diana caught a muttered exclamation, then Captain Poppleton came slowly, reluctantly it seemed, into the room. In his hand was a Bradshaw's Guide, which Diana at once observed.

"Where were you going? Why are you upstairs, Uncle Hugh?" Susie demanded with a child's calm curiosity.

He stood at the foot of the little bed leaning over the rail, and, in the subdued light, looked at the picture before him — the girl in her soft-tinted gown with her arm round the little white figure.

Diana, releasing the child's hand, prepared to get up.

"Don't move!" he cried quickly, almost peremptorily, "and please go on with your song. It seems like a bit of Heaven up here after that silly, chattering crowd below. I — I guessed you were with Susie."

"And yet you weren't coming in till I called you." Susie's voice was reproachful. "And you hadn't said good night to me, and you've never missed before."

"But you ought to have been asleep. It's late, you know."

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"Is it? I never go to sleep on party nights. Everybody makes such a noise. It is nice having you and Miss Wenderby here. I'm never quite so frightfully happy as when just us three are alone together."

"We three," corrected Diana.

"We three. Are you, Uncle Hugh?" Susie had long ago learnt what Uncle Hugh liked.

"Never," he said emphatically.

What is it that moves a man to the deepest emotion, that affects him so profoundly when with the woman he loves and a little child is present?

As Diana finished her song, Hugh Poppleton was stirred to the very depths of his being. With eyes that absorbed her, he stood shaken and swaying as in a storm; and when she left the room he followed her quickly and barred her passage. His restraint was gone.

"Diana," he cried, "I love you. I've tried not to. I've fought against it, God knows, but I love you. I love you. I am not worthy of you — but can you love me a little in return?" His arms were held out to her, supplicatingly, appealingly, almost ashamedly, with a movement that went to Diana's heart. Where was the gay, fearless, self-reliant, reckless Hugh Poppleton? This man, humble, entreating, white-faced, plead-

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ing, was hardly known to her. He who had courted her so openly, so compellingly, so barefacedly. Surely he must know — know a thousand times over that he had won her heart, and that she was only waiting for him to tell her of his love, longing to hear the words.

“Yes,” she said simply, and her voice was very sweet and grave, “I can, and do love you, and more than a little, Hugh.”

With a swift movement he had her in his arms, straining her to his heart, showering kisses upon her bare neck and face and hair, murmuring broken words of endearment, regardless of where he was and that any servant passing along the landing to the bedrooms would inevitably see them. Time stood still for them both. They were alone in the universe.

And so absorbed were they that they heard no footsteps on the stairs, no sound of any one ascending, till a voice sharp and harsh startled them as it fell upon their ears: “Hugh! Ah, I’m too late, too late.” And Mr. Poppleton stood before them breathless, his face deeply troubled.

“I have opened this — this cablegram by mistake. It came to the studio this afternoon — late. My housekeeper, thinking it might be

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important, has brought it down. She'd some time to wait for a train — is it for you?" Slowly, deliberately, he drew a paper from an envelope in his hand, and passed it to his brother, and watched him as he read it, and as the face a moment back so happy, so full of passionate tenderness, whitened and aged in every feature, Mr. Poppleton turned to Diana and asked her to leave them. His voice was very gentle.

"No," she said, white-faced too, trembling in every limb, but outwardly composed. "I cannot go. What affects your brother affects me. If he is in trouble, I must help him, for I have just told him that I love him. Hugh, may I see that paper?" It had fallen from his nerveless hand to the ground, but she would not look at it till he said she might.

He hesitated, hesitated while you might have counted twenty, and Mr. Poppleton watched him fixedly. Hugh had been a cad during the last few weeks, a coward, a dishonest man. Was he going to remain so? Or would he seize this one opportunity which had been offered to him of retrieving a little of his honour? Mr. Poppleton found himself praying to God that he would. He had loved his brother with a deep affection, and when Hugh bowed his head, he stretched out his

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hand and laid it on his shoulder with a desire to help him.

Together the brothers watched Diana as she stooped and picked up the paper, and smoothing it out — as though to gain time — with a gesture infinitely pathetic, she held it to the light and read these words: "Poppleton, 3 Wessex Street, Haymarket, London. Your wife died last night. Cable instructions. English Chaplain, Dinapore, Bengal."

She twice read it through. Then she looked up with a puzzled expression upon her face, and drew her hand across her forehead. "I don't understand," she said.

"It refers to my wife," said Hugh in a hard, dry voice. "*My* wife. Somehow they've got hold of my brother's address. I have been married for ten years — secretly — to a Eurasian. I only lived with her for six months. Now she is dead. Had I waited till to-morrow I could have come to you an honest man. But I didn't wait. The devil's had the laugh at me." His own laughter caused Mr. Poppleton to shudder a little.

And Diana said nothing, made no movement, though the blood had drained away from her face and neck and arms, leaving her like one who had died.

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"I was leaving to-night. Daren't trust myself a moment longer. My control had gone. I hungered for you so that I felt like one who was mad when you knelt on the hearth in the drawing-room just now. I looked up a train to town. I came up to pack my things. Susie called me into the room, though I'd got safely past it. You — know the rest. I've fought a hard battle and — lost."

And still Diana said nothing.

"I was twenty-three when I married her and stuck in a dull hot hole. She was handsome and clever and I was a fool. I hated, loathed, detested her in a month. I — but why go into these sordid details? It doesn't help the position ——"

A door opened below. For an instant sounds of voices and laughter came along the hall and up the stairs. Then the door closed. But there was another footstep. Somebody, a woman from the rustle of her dress, a woman with somewhat laboured breathing, was coming up the stairs, slowly but determinedly. There was no preventing her. Diana shrank as Mrs. Poppleton stood before them.

For a moment she stood surveying the little group. She was not a really observant woman. She might, as Mr. Poppleton had once said, be

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able to see through a deal door, but she only saw things on the other side that were either phantoms of her own imagination or trivial things that didn't matter. Really vital issues left her unmoved. She only saw now in the group before her three people indulging in a little pleasant gossip. That they should select a landing for such a purpose in no way struck her as odd or unusual. Her husband and Diana invariably did odd things. The girl's deathly whiteness, Hugh's haggard countenance, her husband's obvious distress were lost upon her.

"I should like," she said, "an explanation of why one by one you steal from the room and do not return? What my guests think of such behaviour, I dare not imagine. Miss Wenderby's and Hugh's disappearance was not of much importance, though somewhat marked, but as for yours, Chris — you may make the excuse you were dummy, but a dummy ought not to remain away from a table for nearly ten minutes and keep everybody waiting. It has been most embarrassing and awkward. I have not known what excuses to make, and finally I have had to leave my guests, and there they sit without any host or hostess while I hunt you out. Will you come at once — " She paused for breath, indignant,



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wrathful. "And what was that that Bennett brought to you? Was it a telegram? But, no, it couldn't have been, it was too late." For the first time she associated it with her husband's prolonged absence from the room, and glanced around suspiciously.

"No, it was not a telegram, it was—Laura——" Mr. Poppleton paused. Should he tell her? Should he appeal to her — to any innate instincts of generosity and sympathy that she might possess to be kind to the stricken girl standing before her, who still made no sound, no movement, whose head was still up — brave, full of courage, but who from sheer physical weakness had been obliged to rest against the wall behind for support, while her eyes gleamed from her white face, deeply sorrowful but undaunted.

Yes, he would tell her. She would have to know sooner or later — perhaps she would be kind. Rapidly he informed her of what had happened. He never glanced at Hugh, but kept straight on with his story. He handed her the cable to confirm his words, "And we must try to get these people away as early as we can. Tell them that somebody is ill. I will go down to them while you see to Miss Wenderby. She is not well."

"And why shouldn't Miss Wenderby be well?"

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"Because, unfortunately," Hugh's voice was dry and bitter, "five minutes before the cable arrived, or, to be exact, a couple of minutes, I had been successful in eliciting from Miss Wenderby, in answer to a declaration on my part, that she returned my affection."

"But your wife is dead," said Mrs. Poppleton, practically. "If she were still alive I could understand all this fuss."

"She was not dead when I — courted Miss Wenderby, nor did I know that she was dead when I told Miss Wenderby of my love for her. Does not that put rather a different aspect on the case — even to you? But need we discuss the position *now*. It seems a little unnecessary with all your guests waiting for you — ah!"

Diana had slipped quietly, without a sound, to the floor, and the rose in her hair lay crushed against the carpet.

## CHAPTER XVIII

The night was over. Toward morning Diana had slept from exhaustion.

Mrs. Poppleton, after her own fashion, had been kind. She failed to understand why there should be all this trouble and fuss, seeing that Hugh was now free and in a position to marry Miss Wenderby if he were so keen on it. Nevertheless when she saw the girl in a heap on the floor, she had been genuinely touched. She had lived with Diana long enough to know that she was not the sort to go under readily, that she possessed plenty of grit — therefore the shock must have been very great to cause her to succumb in this fashion, and lie there looking so deathly white. But it had only been a momentary faintness, scarcely unconsciousness even. Just a sensation of something snapping somewhere, a noise as of many waters, rather pleasant than otherwise, a darkness and a feeling of utter inability to stand.

It had all passed as quickly as it had come. Before Hugh was back with some brandy Diana

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was up and able to walk, certainly with faltering footsteps, but still able to walk to her room. She felt grateful that Mrs. Poppleton was obliged to return to her guests. Before going she had unfastened Diana's frock, removed the rose and hairpins from her hair, and taken off her slippers, leaving her feet, in their thin silk stockings, rather forlorn on the cold linoleum floor. Then she impressed upon her that she must try to have a good night and "not think."

She meant to be kind — indeed she *was* kind, for seeing that the girl was shivering, she went for her own eiderdown and placing it on Diana's bed urged her to hurry up and get beneath it, and she would send Bennett up with a hot-water bottle.

Mrs. Poppleton was filled with a pleasant glow of magnanimity as she descended the stairs. Half an hour ago she had intended giving Diana notice and a piece of her mind. Now she was heaping eiderdowns and hot-water bottles upon her, not to mention best brandy. She felt, too, rather relieved than otherwise that Miss Wenderby would be remaining with her. No one had rubbed Susie so well, or had got the child on so rapidly with her lessons. The prospect that Diana might elect to go of her own accord never

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entered her orderly and well regulated mind. Governesses did not give notice to their employers, only employers to their governesses.

She met Hugh in the hall looking white and wretched.

"How is she?" he inquired eagerly. "Is she better?"

Really Miss Wenderby might have met with a dreadful accident, and Mrs. Poppleton felt so irritated she could scarcely reply.

"She is all right. She has quite got over the faintness, if it *was* faintness. She never went quite off. Now *I* become wholly unconscious. Are you not coming into the drawing-room?"

He shook his head. "No, I don't feel I could stand it. Make my excuses, please. I am going to pack. I expect Miss Wenderby would wish me to leave at once, and without seeing her again."

Mrs. Poppleton passed into the drawing-room without expressing an opinion one way or the other. She felt too tired of everybody.

## CHAPTER XIX

Diana lay awake for hours that night, her face pressed hard into her pillow, her hands against her heart.

She had not known that it was possible to suffer so acutely. Only once had she experienced anything remotely approaching such pain, and that had been on the afternoon she learnt of her parents' loss of money and when she realized it would be her duty to leave home and go out into the world. She had suffered then, but that had been nothing as compared with this. Then she had felt young, now she felt suddenly old. Then she had felt that life might still have something to offer her, in spite of untoward circumstances, now she felt that life was finished, and she was hopeless.

She suffered as those who are still young *do* suffer: intensely, bitterly, combatively. Not as do the old, mildly, philosophically, resignedly.

Her great soreness of spirit lay in the fact that she had been so deceived. Herself, honest by

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nature, she made no allowances for this man who had made love to her so systematically and untiringly, and had won her heart whilst acting a lie. She had no pity for him.

"Had he come and told me all," she moaned, "I would have waited for him. Waited throughout eternity. But he did not trust me. He deceived me. He deceived me from beginning to end. How could he?"

Toward morning she slept from exhaustion.

On waking she wondered dimly and vaguely what was this awful and heavy load at her heart. Then came memory and the realization that life had to be faced and lived through somehow. She lay on her back with heavy eyes and gazed at the ceiling, unconsciously counting all the little cracks on its whitened surface. There were sounds of opening of windows, and lighting of fires. The servants were up. She, too, must rise, and she wondered how she could achieve so gigantic and labourious a task. She felt too tired to move. She stopped counting the cracks and closed her eyes. She remembered that it was only twenty-four hours since she awoke the happiest girl in the world — the very happiest. And now! A hard, dry sob shook her frame.

She had always thus taken everything life had

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had to offer — vividly, keenly, drunk to the very dregs. Now she took her sorrow in one big lump. Took it with both hands and arms and felt crushed and overwhelmed by its weight. She felt she should die. She longed to die.

Had Tommie been close at hand he would have reminded her in his gentle, old-fashioned way, like a man who has looked on long at the game of life, that sorrow, the greatest of all sorrows, the sort of sorrow that eventually kills men and women, is not taken in such fashion, in such one-piece, wholesale fashion, but is taken in bits, in portions, slowly, constantly, endlessly. There are moments of respite every now and again, he would have told her, when one may even smile if one has not forgotten how, and then back comes the pain again, continuing on and on. Not a terrific pain, but a nag, nag, nag, an endless, remorseless nag. Such pain you see in the faces of a few men and women, and when they die the cry goes up: "Ah, it is a happy release for them."

A note was brought to Diana when she had dragged herself up and had nearly finished dressing. It was from Hugh.

"I am leaving this morning (unless by any chance you tell me to stay — miracles have



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happened before). Will you see me for a few moments before I go? If so, I am in the drawing-room *now*.

"H. P."

She went to him immediately, after sending a message to Mrs. Poppleton that she would be grateful if she would allow one of the maids to dress Susie.

Her hair was arranged as usual and was smooth and beautiful, her dress was neat, but she was as white as the Quakerish lawn collar at her throat. The droop of her lips was accentuated, and her eyes were hard and scornful.

She opened the door slowly; outwardly calm she was, but her heart was in a tumult of wild indignation and bitterness against the man standing before her on the hearthrug, his back to the fire, his head up, his hands in his pockets. Captain Poppleton had never run away from the enemy, he had "faced the music" on more occasions than one, he meant now to make a big fight for his happiness, though he knew he did not deserve it. The greater the odds, the more need for hard fighting.

"Well?"

And at her first word and the sound of the voice that uttered it he winced a little.

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"Ah, do not say it like that," he pleaded, making a movement toward her.

She backed, her hands straight and stiff at her sides. "You wished to speak to me, Captain Poppleton?"

"Yes," he said. There was a moment's hesitation, then, for the first time in his dealings with her, he was direct and straight and came to the point at once. "I wish to tell you I am deeply sorry for the wrong I have done you. If there were anything, anything in the whole world I could do to wipe it out, I would do it."

The sincerity in his voice and manner touched her. She had expected heroics and excuses. This quiet, restrained man was new to her.

She stood looking at him silently. There seemed nothing to say, but the set of her lips became less rigid.

"I repeat I am deeply sorry. I have behaved badly and in a cowardly fashion. I realize it now, and, if you will believe me, I have realized it all along. I have fought against my love for you, fought hard."

"Perhaps not so hard as you think, Captain Poppleton. You are a soldier, and know that a man who fights really hard, determining to win,

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does win, unless the odds against him are enormous, if he be a strong man."

"The odds were enormous. There was you."

"And you are not strong."

He winced a little.

"No," he said humbly.

"I am sorry I said that. One should not kick a man when he is down."

The gentleness of her tone gave him false hope, and suddenly he seized his courage with both hands. "I suppose you could never forgive me?"

"I will try." She said it with an apparent effort.

"By forgiveness — I mean——" He came nearer, his heart in his eyes, his arms outstretched.

"It is not necessary to explain. I understand the meaning of the word."

"By forgiveness I mean," he continued doggedly, "marry me."

"Never!" she cried emphatically.

"You said last night that you loved me."

"It hardly seems fair to remind me of such an admission under existing circumstances, Captain Poppleton — I mean, fair or kind to yourself." Her irony bit deep, but he went on:

"I presume then that if you won't marry me, your love for me is dead?"

Her desire was to lie, but her innate honesty

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prevented this. "No," she said, and now in her voice there was a world of sorrow, "not yet. That is my misfortune, my great, great misfortune. I have not ceased to love you, but I have ceased to respect you. A woman — my type — does not marry a man when she looks down upon him as I look down upon you, because I regard marriage as a high and holy estate. My body, the material side, still loves you because you are good to look upon — big, and fine, and handsome, and attractive; but the other side, the spiritual side of me, despises you. You have deceived me, for two long months you have acted a lie to me. Were I to be weak enough to marry you because I want you now, want to feel your arms around me," she went on unflinchingly, "want to hear your voice, to touch you, to listen to your gay laughter, neither you nor I would really be happy. For I should never forget that lie, my trust in you would be gone. Always would the memory of that lie be with me, festering like a wound — " She drew herself up now to her full height, and her eyes blazed upon him with scorn. "I should say and believe I had forgiven you, but I should never really forget. I should be suspicious of you, and you would know it. I find it difficult to dissemble, to act a part. Ah!"

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she cried, and again her anger and scorn fell away from her, "if you had but told me, trusted me, come to me and said: 'Diana, I love you, but I cannot ask you to marry me, for I already have a wife. Will you wait for me till something occurs to release me from my bondage?' I would have waited."

"But it might have been for life."

"Well, then, I would still have waited. And something would have happened — the gods love those who love truly — and something *did* happen. Your wife died —— "

"And it was too late." The hope had gone from his voice.

"It — was too late," she repeated sadly. Then without offering him her hand in farewell, she turned and left him.

Half an hour later she heard a cab drive up to the door, the sound of luggage being carried down the stairs, voices in the hall, the cab drive away, and then the shutting of the outer door.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" she cried, drowned in sobs as she knelt against the side of her bed, her face pressed against the stiff, white counterpane. "What *shall* I do?"

**BOOK III**  
**DIANA — A WOMAN**



## CHAPTER I

And Diana found plenty to do. There was work at her hand ready and waiting imperatively to be done, and the doing of it helped her to pull through her own trouble, helped her and saved her.

A fortnight later Mrs. Poppleton died.

She contracted a chill the night of her dinner-party. Her rose-du-Barri gown was thin, and revealed too much of the chest, which was never her strongest point. She stood about passages and cold bedrooms, as she explained to the doctor afterward, to look after her governess, with whom there was nothing really the matter, and she gave up her eiderdown to that same governess.

It was hard, admittedly, that one of the few acts of self-sacrifice of Mrs. Poppleton's life should have been rewarded by an attack of bronchitis which brought about her death. For bronchitis had her in its grip, a sharp, severe attack.



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"I felt shivers running up and down my spine the whole night," she said in a hoarse, gaspy voice. "I could not get warm. I piled a rug and my dressing-gown on the bed, but after an eiderdown — and mine is a very thick, warm one — well, nothing helps."

"Oh," said Diana, "if I *had* but known." She was stricken with remorse when she contemplated the fact that that self-same eiderdown had slipped from her own bed through her restless tossing and had lain on the floor the whole of the night.

She threw herself into the nursing of Mrs. Poppleton with the thoroughness and wholeheartedness she devoted to everything that came her way. For the time being her entire energies were concentrated in exacting as much steam from one kettle as it could reasonably be expected to yield, in impregnating that steam with soothing Friar's balsam, in keeping the sick room at an even temperature, in endeavouring to alleviate the patient's paroxysms of coughing, and in persuading the patient to remain under the clothes and not expose her arms in a search after a housekeeping purse which she insisted upon keeping in its customary place at the head of the bed. She had no time to think or dwell

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upon her own misery, she had no time to miss Captain Poppleton.

Mrs. Poppleton was a difficult patient. She worried about any and every thing connected with the management of the house. She was convinced that the best silver and glass had not been put away after the dinner-party. Her imagination saw the cut ports and sherries lying in fragments in the back kitchen sink amongst the pots and pans. Had the entrée dishes — some of which had been hired — been wrapped up ready to return to town? Had the best tablecloth been put back in the linen cupboard? There was scarcely a mark on it; it could be used again when she gave a sandwich and lemonade party to their more impecunious friends.

"Don't worry," Diana urged, as she saw the flushed cheeks and listened to the laboured wheezing of the lungs. "What can such trifles matter?" But to satisfy the patient she went downstairs and wrestled with the glass and silver, and wrapped up the dishes, and put away the cloth.

Mr. Poppleton did not return to town on Monday, but helped Diana all he could by taking Susie off her hands and keeping the child amused. He also did what he could in the sick room and

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undertook the night duty, but his wife was restless and intractable without Diana, and he found he was obliged to call her up three or four times a night.

At the end of the third day the doctor ordered a nurse.

"You will knock up," he said to Diana. And she objected vehemently to such a proposition. Mrs. Poppleton would hate a nurse she was sure, and she felt no fatigue and liked the work.

"You either have a nurse or I give up the case," said the young doctor, drily. He might agree to the technical inexactitude of rheumatoid arthritis being the name of the complaint Mrs. Poppleton had been suffering from up to now, but he would not agree to having another invalid on his hands, especially such a nice, attractive girl as Diana. The two feverish spots on Diana's pale cheeks, her dry, hot hands, her restless zeal for work, her unflagging devotion to every detail connected with the nursing had not escaped his attention. "There is something the matter with her — she's been ill, or going to be ill if I'm not careful; or she's had a shock," he said to himself; "mental trouble, I should say."

So the nurse came — a sweet, calm-faced woman, capable, yet gentle, with none of the aggressive-

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ness of so many of the profession, and none of the overbearing manner toward the servants of the house.

In her hands Mrs. Poppleton became amenable, almost docile. The housekeeping purse left the pocket above the bed and went into Diana's. To tell the truth, Mrs. Poppleton became a little frightened about herself. Only once before had she had a nurse, and that had been at the birth of Susie. A nurse in uniform must mean two guineas a week at least, and that must mean that she was really ill. She lay and considered this with her eyes closed. Her husband had better return to work at once and make some money quickly toward the doctor's bill and the expense of the nurse. She put her thought into words.

"But I want to stay and help to nurse you," said Mr. Poppleton, gently.

"You can do very little now, and you must find the days long and dull," she replied with unconscious reproach. Without all the elaborate curls and rolls, her hair simply parted, and in a loose, white, quilted wrapper, with the high colour gone from her face as her temperature dropped, Mrs. Poppleton looked more like the Laura of her youthful days than her husband had seen her for years.

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He said nothing, and asked her if he should read to her a little. Diana had gone out for some fresh air at his earnest request; the nurse was sleeping.

She shook her head. "No, thank you; I only like Miss Wenderby's reading."

She lay silent for some time. Her breathing was laboured but less difficult than it had been. He sat and watched her. Now that she was laid low, he longed to be able to tell her of his regret that their estrangement had been so great of late. He had no real love for her in his heart; that he could not pretend, but he had a deep pity for her and for himself. Neither of them had been happy, but perhaps it had been worse for her. He had had his work and the life of the world outside, and she had gone on loving him in her own fashion, that he knew. And she also knew that it had not been returned. Had she minded very much? Had she cared? She seemed to have fallen asleep. The afternoon was waning. Twilight was creeping into the room. It was time she had some medicine or some nourishment.

He bent quietly over the bed and looked at her long and earnestly, and, as he looked, two tears forced themselves through the closed lashes and fell down her cheeks. She was crying in her

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sleep! She must be very unhappy! Sorrow and remorse swept through his heart, remorse for the many hard words he had said to her.

Because she was ill and looked weak and white and younger, and because Mr. Poppleton was generous by nature, he forgot that nearly all these words had been brought on by herself, that she had invariably been the aggressor, always picked the quarrels.

He forgot how peaceful the house had seemed to him the last few days without her presence, and how, when he had drawn up his chair to the hearth of an evening, he had sighed from relief, though his conscience reproached him that he could enjoy his paper in peace, and even poke up the fire if he felt so inclined without an admonishing finger being raised at him. He only remembered that she was his wife whom he had once loved, the mother of his child, that she was ill, and that she was crying in her sleep.

She moved and opened her eyes, and started at seeing his face so close to hers.

"What are you doing?" she asked suspiciously. "I was asleep. Am I worse?" There was fear in her voice.

"Oh, no," he reassured her. "You are much better, the doctor says, to-day. I was wondering

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whether I ought to wake you to have your beef tea."

"It's my medicine time, not my beef tea. See, here are the directions. And you should never wake a patient, unless sinking, under any consideration. Nurse says so."

He smiled as he gave her the medicine. She certainly wasn't sinking.

"I wonder when Miss Wenderby will be in. It's late for Susie to be out."

She never seemed happy for long now without Diana.

"I wonder whether she'll ever marry him," she said after a time.

"Who? Do you mean Miss Wenderby marry Hugh?"

"Yes."

"Never! I'm sure."

This was the first time the subject had been mentioned between them since Hugh left. Mrs. Poppleton had not seen him to bid him good-by. She had been too poorly. Mr. Poppleton had parted from his brother with few words. He felt sorry for him. He had always liked him and envied him his careless, happy existence. But now his envy had gone. He would not change to be in his brother's shoes. He may have had

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a hard life, devilish hard to be married to a woman he had had to hide away in a corner in India; but he had behaved badly to Diana, and he was deeply sorry for the girl. He, too, Chris, had had a hard life, but as you make your bed, etc., etc. Like Diana, he had little pity for the weak ones of this world, perhaps not enough pity.

"I am beginning to be rather sorry," said Mrs. Poppleton. "I think she would have made him a good wife, and I'm sure she's fond of him, still fond of him."

"Possibly!" Mr. Poppleton was surprised. "But why have you changed your mind about it? It's not a week since you were dead against such a marriage."

"Well, I'm sorry for her over this business. Hugh has not treated her well. I think it's extraordinary the way he has succeeded in keeping that black woman" [Mrs. Poppleton allowed no differences between black or half-castes, or indeed any race that was not white. They were all the same to her — all niggers.] "hidden away for so long, and nobody with any suspicion that he was married all the time. I shouldn't have thought that he could have been so clever. But, still, seeing that she is now dead, I think it's a lot of foolish quixotism (the word



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brought on a fit of coughing) on Miss Wenderby's part. All the same I rather admire her for giving him up. It shows she's not so keen on making a good marriage as I thought."

Mr. Poppleton moved to the window, trying to suppress his irritation.

"I'm surprised you *did* think it. Whether her marriage was a good or a bad one, from the standpoint of the world, would be the last thing she would bother her head about, I'm sure."

"Well, it looks like it. But I'm surprised she's let him go. She seemed so genuinely fond of him."

"And that's just why she has. A girl who wanted to marry him for the sake of being married, and for his position, wouldn't care two peas about his honour. But Miss Wenderby holds it a more important thing. That's just where all the trouble comes in."

"I see," said Mrs. Poppleton. "And there are Susie and Miss Wenderby; I hear their voices at the gate. But all the same I think Miss Wenderby is cutting off her nose to spite her face."

Toward the end of the second week of her illness Mrs. Poppleton contracted a fresh chill. How, her two careful nurses could not discover.

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She had been so much better, her cough had almost gone, her appetite had returned, though she'd a craving, she said, for things "made by her own hands." She had even been allowed to sit up in her room for a short time in front of the fire, with the eiderdown tucked round her knees and many warm wraps about her shoulders.

Then came the chill. Mrs. Poppleton could have told them all about it, but wisely refrained from so doing. Her conscience pricked her nevertheless.

The nurse was out for a walk. Diana had gone down to the drawing-room to see Mrs. Westingale, who had called to make inquiries about Mrs. Poppleton, and who, after the manner of some importunate visitors when there is sickness in a house, refused to be satisfied with a message from the servant, "and would Miss Wenderby see her just for a minute?"

"I don't like leaving you," Diana said anxiously. "Mr. Poppleton has taken Susie for a walk. Shall I send Bennett up to you?"

But Mrs. Poppleton would not hear of such a suggestion. Bennett was busy. She was perfectly all right. She would read the paper. She would, in fact, enjoy being alone for a little while, and Diana must not hurry Mrs. Westingale

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away. If she exhibited signs of desiring afternoon tea, afternoon tea must be given to her. Mr. Westingale had said on the night of the dinner-party that some day he hoped he might be permitted to visit Mr. Poppleton's studio. A nice afternoon tea might pave the way to such a visit. Times were bad (they weren't really), expenses just now were very heavy. Mrs. Poppleton went faint at the very thought of the doctor's bill.

Reluctantly Diana went, after giving the invalid a final tuck into her chair and adjusting the warm fleecy shawl around her shoulders.

No sooner was she alone than Mrs. Poppleton was out of her chair. She longed to see the nursery. She felt the house was going to rack and ruin. She was convinced the nursery was dirty and untidy. The thought of such a condition worried her during the wakeful hours of the night. It could do her no possible harm just to pop down the passage and see. Her cough was practically gone, her strength was returning. She was much better in every respect. Her dressing-gown was warm. She wouldn't be away a minute. Opening her door she surveyed the passage a little breathlessly. The coast was clear. As she ran along and the old familiar objects revealed them-

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selves — the little table with the candlestick bearing the inscription "good night, my friend," which nobody ever used, the chair upon which nobody ever sat, the lamp against the wall, the new Axminster mats at the doors purchased in honour of Hugh's visit — she recollected that the last time she had been in the passage was when the "scene," as she so described it to herself, had taken place, and Diana had slipped to the ground and the yellow rose had lain crushed against the carpet. What a lot had happened since then! Hugh had gone. A nurse had come, she herself had been ill with bronchitis. It was good to be about again, it would be still better when she was permanently about and could see to things once more. Diana did her best she was sure, but the white doors of the passage were very finger-marked, and there was dust along the panels.

The "minute" in the nursery extended to three. It *was* rather untidy and — the window was open.

Mrs. Poppleton was back in her place before Diana's return, with the eiderdown carefully tucked in round her knees and a most innocent expression on her countenance, but her breathing seemed a little more laboured, Diana fancied, and

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her cheeks were flushed. Diana added more water to the kettle, which was apt to boil dry, and more Friar's balsam, and made up the fire.

She suggested, after a while, that Mrs. Poppleton should retire to bed, to which the invalid at once acceded, and she noticed that as she helped her out of her dressing-gown and into the white wrapper that she shivered and that her cheeks were very flushed.

"I hope you have not got a fresh chill," said Diana anxiously.

But Mrs. Poppleton had. During the three minutes she stood tidying the nursery, with the damp air from the open window blowing in upon her, she contracted such a chill that pleuro-pneumonia set in, and three days later she was dead.

Just before the end she said to Diana: "If anything should happen to me — though I don't anticipate such a thing — will you stay and look after Susie?"

She spoke with extreme difficulty, and in such a failing voice Diana could scarcely catch the words.

"I will, Mrs. Poppleton."

She seemed relieved and turned on her side with a satisfied air as though preparing for sleep.

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She spoke once again: "You have been very good . . . to me . . . thank you."

Whether she meant her husband or Diana they did not know. They were both close to the bed, but her eyes were shut. She sank into unconsciousness soon after, and a few hours later passed into the unseen and unknown.

## CHAPTER II

Death had dealt kindly with Mrs. Poppleton, had come at the end gently. Now, wrapped in profound slumber, she looked peaceful and happy. All the bitterness, the selfishness, the narrowness of her small warped nature, which in life had written their lines on her face—as they will write themselves—were smoothed out in death. Her features had become almost ennobled.

Mr. Poppleton knelt alone beside the bed and looked at the face long and earnestly, and at the large form stretched out so straight and still beneath the white sheet. His was no passionate grief. He was not a hypocrite. Now she was gone he did not wish her back. He felt that it was better so.

“Perhaps it was the only way, the only way out of our difficulties,” he murmured, “that one of us should be taken. We may both have been saved infinite suffering. God is always merciful.” He knelt on and prayed long and earnestly, prayed for help to guide his child aright, prayed

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for forgiveness for his shortcomings toward his dead wife.

The shadows lengthened in the room, the form on the bed became dim. Gently he kissed one of the cold, cold hands and put the sheet back over the face.

"I would gladly have gone instead of you had God willed it so," he whispered, "but as it is, Laura, may your poor troubled soul rest in peace."

And he left her alone.

The funeral was over. The blinds were up, the sun shone into the rooms once more.

There had been few mourners: a sister and brother of Mrs. Poppleton came up from the Midlands, a Miss Honeydew — a cousin of Mr. Poppleton — one or two old friends from town, who hurried away for their train as soon as the ceremony was over. Bogmere was represented by half a dozen people who came and returned in their own carriages, Diana and Mrs. Faggott. Susie had been sent away for the day to an old servant at Windlesham End, and Katherine Bruce-Napier had asked her in to tea.

After their own tea Mr. Poppleton went for a walk with his cousin, Miss Dorcas Honeydew, to the Old Mill, greatly scandalizing the village,



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but bringing a certain amount of peaceful pleasure to his own tired heart and body, for the February sunshine lay pleasant along the meadows, chiffrons kept reiterating the cheerful statement that spring was coming, and Miss Dorcas Honeydew had always been noted for her soothing and, at the same time, stimulating qualities of mind and person.

"What are you going to do, Chris?" she asked as they crossed the first meadow, lifting her black silk skirt away from the grass and revealing a pair of ankles that would have done credit to a girl in her teens.

Miss Dorcas was sixty-five years of age, and carried them well and with becoming dignity. She had always lived *up* to her age and not *down* to it — hence had remained perennially attractive. "It is hard, of course, that advancing years in a woman should be regarded as little short of a crime by the rest of her own sex, but each of us in turn has got to face this ordeal," she had been heard to say. "The woman who is clever frankly acknowledges each birthday as it comes round, and says 'the Lord's will be done.' The woman who is not clever regards the calendar as an unnecessary institution, indeed has no use for it in her scheme of existence, and has no sense

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or resignation toward the will of the Lord. Instead she invokes the aid of Madame Wemery, the great masseuse, who warrants that your wrinkles will disappear while you wait and your hair become the colour of a ripe chestnut in autumn sunshine. Result — simply appalling!”

Her own hair, lying in beautiful ripples beneath her most becoming bonnet, was soft and white as the fleece of a newly washed sheep, and there was a delicate pink colour in her cheeks.

“What shall I do, Dorcas?” said Mr. Poppleton. “You mean how shall I arrange my life? I shall give up my chambers in town and come down here to look after the little one.” He was unaware of the hope and freshness in his voice as he said this. “There is a good studio here with a good light, and Miss Wenderby has agreed to remain on and teach Susie — the child is devoted to her.”

“How old are you, Chris?” inquired Miss Dorcas as she allowed herself to be helped over a quite easy stile. If her cousin regarded her as old and helpless, well, let him, if it pleased him.

“Forty-three.”

“And Miss Wenderby is twenty-four or five, I should say, though she looks more because

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she is overtired and far from well, I can see. You can't live together."

Mr. Poppleton walked along in silence. "I never thought of that," he said after a moment or two. He switched the head off a nettle with irritation.

"Of course you didn't. You wouldn't. Your mind is far too unpractical."

Mr. Poppleton, in his perturbation, did not help Miss Dorcas over the next stile, which was difficult to circumvent, and she emerged from the ordeal a little breathless.

"Of course, too, you might become fond of Miss Wenderby."

Miss Dorcas had known of the relationship between her cousin and his wife; it therefore seemed no sacrilege to her to speak in such a direct manner with the funeral only just over. Things had to be faced in a sensible way, and with Mr. Poppleton in a softened biddable mood, this seemed a suitable moment.

"I shall never do that," he returned with emphasis. "My love-making and marrying days are over. I take no interest in women as — women. I have Susie and my work. They will more than fill my life." And he spoke the truth.

"Well, that helps the position a little," said

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Miss Dorcas, "still, Miss Wenderby can't live here alone with you and Susie. Her parents wouldn't permit it, from what I can see of the bringing up of the girl, and the whole world would talk."

"Yes," said Mr. Poppleton, gloomily, "I suppose it would. In fact I'm sure of it."

"Miss Wenderby, then, will have to go."

"But that is out of the question; Susie and I couldn't get on without her. It's impossible. We can't be left to the tender mercies of the servants. I'm frightened, as it is, of Bennett." He spoke like a great big school-boy, and Miss Dorcas was secretly amused. What a nice man he was! And how happy he would have made the majority of women! What he needed was a little mothering, and gentle care, and fussing over. She longed to give it to him, but her plans must crystallize slowly. She was not one to rush at things. Like the wine of an old vintage which should be taken slowly and in sips, and with discrimination, and turned over and over in the mouth, she allowed her ideas to sink in gently.

"What, then, can be done?" she asked. "It is agreed that Miss Wenderby can't stay on with you alone, and you assert that you and Susie

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cannot get on without her. That leaves one remaining issue open: you must have somebody else — an older woman to come and act as chaperon and look after your house and take the head of your table.”

Mr. Poppleton stopped smoking, and again allowed Miss Dorcas to scramble over the third stile unassisted. *He* was passing a harassing hour, and *she* one full of unwonted athletic exercise.

This suggestion having taken root, she passed on by easy stages and fine diplomacy to her last card but one.

“There is your sister-in-law, Henrietta; she is unmarried, she is tired of living at home with nothing to do. She is an unselfish and patient and amiable person. She could contribute something toward the expenses of the house. She is fond of you and Susie. Her church principles are sound, her health is good, her instincts are those of a lady, her ——”

“Don’t,” groaned Mr. Poppleton; “say no more, Dorcas! I would sooner lose Miss Wenderby.” In his agitation he leant against the fourth stile, effectually barring Miss Dorcas’s descent. “Is there nobody else? No other middle-aged unattached woman?”

“There are heaps.”

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"But, I generally dislike them all. Why ——" He stopped, and it was then Miss Dorcas played her trump card.

"Of course *I* am an old lady, and — I don't suppose ——" She sighed and looked down.

"Why, Dorcas!" In his exuberance Mr. Poppleton seized his cousin by the waist and positively jumped her to the ground. "You don't mean to say that *you* would come?"

"I have been leading up to that for the last half hour," said she serenely, putting her pretty bonnet straight. "Chris, I'd love to take care of you for a bit, give you nice, indigestible things to eat, and a fire in that little cold room of yours, and nice warm, unfashionable carpet slippers for your feet. And see that a big jar of 'baccy and plenty of matches were always at your elbow, and watch the lines fade away from that tired face of yours. You were always my boy, and I hunger after mothering somebody."

There were tears in her sweet old eyes, and I'm not sure there were not a couple in Mr. Poppleton's as, arm in arm, they turned about and went home.

So that was settled. Mr. Poppleton's and Miss Dorcas's and Susie's lives were arranging themselves beautifully. Never had Mr. Poppleton

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known such quiet happiness. His conscience often reproached him that he *was* so happy, his kind heart ached when he thought of the woman laid away in the little churchyard over the hill. He had always been a religious man, and he prayed earnestly morning and night that a greater happiness had been granted to her in her new life than had been granted to her upon earth, and that plenty of work had been found for her active, tireless hands to perform. He firmly believed that in the House above there were indeed many mansions, and for some there would be work and others just rest.

### CHAPTER III

Diana wrote and told Tommie of her unhappiness, and she felt no lack of pride in so doing. Indeed she was not proud where her heart was concerned. When she heard girls boast that they were too sensible to show their real feelings to men even when they loved and knew they were loved in return, she could not understand their attitude. Perhaps the directness of her own nature, added to an utter lack of coquetry, accounted for the simplicity of her dealings with all men throughout her life. She would have scorned to play "Catch me who catch can," if already caught.

Katherine Bruce-Napier had once said to her: "It is the greatest mistake to let a man know he has won your heart. Marry him, but do so protesting." To which Diana had replied expressively, "bunkum!"

So if Tommie, in reply to her letter, should send her one of pity, and hint delicately that she had been reduced to an object of scorn, she would



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not resent it. (Not that Tommie would.) Her pride would not be up in arms. She would make no excuses for Captain Poppleton. She felt she had been humbled in the dust, and she wanted and needed somebody's sympathy.

"You will have guessed" [she wrote] "that I had become fond of Captain Poppleton; indeed, I learned to love him greatly. He courted me ardently, almost from our first meeting, and I never was so happy. I enjoyed every moment of our time together. He was such good company, so gay, so happy, so altogether attractive. And as I loved him, I knew that he loved me — a girl always knows. And now it is over — my dream of happiness. He was married all the time. That his wife is now dead, that he heard the news of her death five minutes after he had told me of his love for me, makes no difference. This *you* will understand. He had not played the game with me fairly. He had deceived me cruelly for many weeks. His wife's dying — she was a Eurasian, and a young woman — was unforeseen. She equally might not have died. The position is the same to me. He asked me to be his wife, believing she was alive.

"I am *very* unhappy and hopeless.

"In the beginning there was work to be done — that helped me. Mrs. Poppleton was taken ill with a sharp attack of bronchitis the day of

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Captain Poppleton's departure. Now, she is dead — perhaps you have heard this from my people. I do not know whether you are still in Italy or have returned home. Poor Mrs. Poppleton! But I believe she is one of those people who is happier dead than alive.

"Now my work is finished and there seems nothing left to me. I think often of something father said to me on the shore the day before I went to school. It was about people into whose lives sorrow came. He said the brave ones began to 'do' instead of just 'be,' and the ones who were cowards and sat down under their loads were encumbrances on the face of the earth, and should be snuffed out.

"I don't want to belong to the latter class, but — duty — you know the lines:

"*"I slept and dreamed that life was beauty:  
I woke and found that life was duty."*

And duty is so hard and dull and difficult."

His reply came a week later:

"You did not finish the verse —

"*"Was then my dream a shadowy lie?  
Toil on, sad heart, courageously,  
And thou shalt find thy dream to be  
Noonday, and light, and life to thee."*

Do not be hopeless. Try to believe that the noonday and light and life *will* come. I struggle

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on with this hope before me, cheating myself into believing that they will come.

"You and I are indeed now comrades in distress. And the irony of it all is that *you* are the cause of mine, and another is the cause of yours. What a pity there can't be a reshuffling of the cards, but I suppose there can't. The jade luck eludes me.

"Anyhow your letter makes me feel *my* noonday and light and life are as far away as ever. So I must accept the inevitable, and when the old man is gone I shall devote my life to travel, and knock about this grand old world. It's not bad sport, and Stevenson was right, it is full of a number of things. T. S.

"I find I've not offered you one word of sympathy, but it's there, believe me. But what can a man say?"

"He could have said many things," said Diana slowly, after reading the letter through three times, "and he needn't have mentioned what a jolly time he was having. He knows it has been the wish of my life to go to Italy."

Feeling thoroughly aggrieved, she tore the letter into bits and burnt them.

She went home for Easter, but she did not see Tommie. He was away again — this time on a fishing expedition, and he sent her a long and glowing description of his catches.

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It was good to be at home again, good to be with the dear parents, and in the old familiar rooms and garden. Good to go for strolls again arm in arm with her father, and sit and chat with her mother through the long spring afternoons, but Heatherland without Tommie was dull. She did not know or realize that its dulness was because he wasn't there. She believed that it was because her heart was still so sore for Hugh Poppleton, that she still loved him, still wanted him.

She did not tell her mother of her unfortunate love affair, but Mrs. Wenderby knew that there had been some trouble, she could hear it in her child's voice, see it in her face.

"Why, even her walk has changed," she said to Mr. Wenderby. "I wonder what can be the matter." She looked through the window and watched Diana as she walked up and down the long slope of grass arm in arm with Dru-silla.

"Yes," agreed Mr. Wenderby, "there is something wrong." He joined his wife at the window. "She seems to be making an effort to be cheerful all the while. She is less *alive* than she was. Perhaps the life has told on her — the narrowness of it, the confinement." He sighed. "I wish

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my children hadn't to leave home and fight for their livings while I — not old, not lazy — sit at home and do nothing. It is hard to be born weak constitutionally. I suppose I shouldn't have married, but I had money then." His voice contained a bitterness Mrs. Wenderby had rarely, if ever, heard before.

"If you hadn't married there would have been one less happy woman in the world," she said, slipping her hand into his arm and stroking his sleeve, "and there would have been no Victoria, nor Drusilla, nor Diana, nor George! Think of that!" And a universe without those four would have been so barren a place to Mr. and Mrs. Wenderby that they wisely desisted from even contemplating it.

Drusilla, as they strolled up and down the grass, now becoming starred with daisies, was telling Diana of her latest love affair. There was generally some man to whom she had just violently given her heart and affection. This time it was the drawing master at her school.

Diana was interested, as usual. However unhappy she herself might be, she would never cease to be interested in other people's affairs.

"But you couldn't marry him," she said in her most settling manner, after Drusilla had described

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his mournful dark eyes and white teeth, for the second time.

"Why not?"

"Oh, one doesn't marry drawing masters any more than one marries organ grinders."

Drusilla failed to see the connection.

"There are two classes of men," said Diana, generalizing, "it would be impossible to marry: auctioneers — men who sit on high stools behind desks with a hammer, and who wink and make facetious remarks—and drawing masters."

Drusilla was very indignant, and a heated argument followed. At the end of ten minutes, exhausted, she stopped, and said that it didn't really matter, as he was already married.

"Why ever didn't you say so before?" exclaimed Diana; "such a waste of time!"

"I only wanted to prove to you that a drawing master could be and is married."

"Yes, but not to a girl like you," objected Diana, and she was ready to begin all over again, but Drusilla was going to pay calls with her mother and said she couldn't stop.

Diana went off to the Dale alone. This was William Spong's afternoon for visiting Victoria. She didn't feel in a mood for her future brother-in-law, though she had not seen him since her

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return. Victoria expressed surprise at her lack of enthusiasm for an early meeting. "He often, in fact, always asks after you," she said slightly aggrieved.

"Very kind, I'm sure. I have a recipe for him for the encouragement of the growth of the hair, by the way."

"Oh!" Victoria gazed at the ceiling. Diana had not improved.

"Yes, you brush the scalp with hard whale-bone bristles night and morning for ten minutes till it's all red and tingly. This brings the blood to the surface, and the hair begins to sprout like mustard and cress, or ought to. Good-bye"

It was a soft, warm April day, and a delicious veil of young green mantled the hedges and trees, and, already, in the more sheltered parts of the Dale, tiny, delicate, curly fronds of bracken were pushing their way up through the loose, light soil.

Finding the grassy patch amongst the heather and gorse where she and Tommie had so often sat, Diana lay down. She took off her hat and with her hands supporting her chin, and her eyes on the Dee and Welsh hills, and the little threads of white smoke from the passing trains which, in the distance, looked like ants creeping along the valleys, she set herself out to think of Hugh

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Poppleton. Here her fancy had often brought him. He would have sat close to the gorse bush whose blossom was filling the air with a delicate scent of crushed almonds, and it would have acted as a screen from the wind while he lit his innumerable cigarettes — he was not a smoker of a pipe like Tommie. *She* would have been where she was — right in the sun — and she would have told him stories of her childish days; how she had done this with Tommie and how she had done that; of her fishing for eels in the pond away in the field to the right, and her fear of unhooking them when caught — having been far too proud ever to accept Tommie's assistance, in case a day should come when he would dub her "only a girl"; and of her searching for crabs amongst the rocks just visible as the tide was out; and, on discovering some clams one day and that they were edible, excited Tommie's admiration by sitting and swallowing a dozen on the spot.

And thinking thus of Tommie brought a sensation of grievance to her heart. It was too bad, too thoughtless, too unkind of him to go away on a fishing expedition in Ireland just when she was home for her holidays. He might know that she would miss him, especially after the trouble she had been in.



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Two tears forced themselves to the surface and dropped to the patch of grass upon which her elbows rested, and the Dee and hills beyond became a blur. Men were very selfish.

A plover, wheeling, dropped to earth close by, and walked about in the aimless fashion adopted by plovers when wishful of putting intrusive human beings off the scent as to the whereabouts of their nests; but Diana was up to their tricks. She watched the bird for some time, and then, when it disappeared, cautiously rose and began her search. In less than five minutes she was rewarded. Between two ridges of a ploughed field she came across the carelessly jerry-built nest, and it contained four eggs. Her heart beat pleurably. There was always a certain amount of excitement attached to the finding of plovers' eggs. How interested Tommie would be when she told him — but he was away in Ireland. Again came the sensation of grievance and hurt.

She walked home with her eyes on the ground and in depressed mood. She imagined she was thinking of and longing for Hugh Poppleton, but she was mistaken — Tommie Sutherland crowded him out.

She pictured him wading in the little brawling river he had described, with the grave look of

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concentration on his face as he cast his fly, and she saw him playing his fish — a beautiful two-pound trout. She'd always wanted to learn fly-fishing. And Tommie had done so, he'd been first, he'd stolen a march on her.

"I believe he's deliberately avoiding me," she muttered as she went up the moss-grown steps and through the front gates to Moss Deeping. "Just as though it was not possible for us to be friends as of old. He's a fool!" The gates fell to with a clang.

But that's just what he wasn't. Tommie had suddenly begun to be clever.

## CHAPTER IV

The year passed slowly — on leaden feet to Diana. But she stuck pluckily to her work. She played and romped with Susie, she went for walks, and talked art, poetry, and books with Mr. Poppleton, but missed the fine intelligence and discriminating judgment Tommie had always brought to bear on the two latter subjects. She chatted with and loved and revered dear old Miss Dorcas. She bathed and kissed and cuddled Katherine's baby, which arrived one beautiful summer day, with Diana there ready to agree with Maurice — who had been allowed one peep — that never had a more wonderful, astonishing, and beautiful scrap of humanity descended upon this dull old world. She also went on long rambles alone, and took up sketching; and when Mr. Poppleton tried to be polite to her about her efforts, she frankly told him not to perjure his soul — she just wanted to fill up her time and always be busy.

Fill up her time! When in the past her days had never been long enough.

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She also began to write, and with this she was more successful. Several charming children's stories found their way to the magazines, and several cheques into her pocket. She was never a moment idle, working at something from the moment she got up in the morning till she went to bed at night — untiringly, almost feverishly. But her laugh was not so gay as of old, and her face beneath the blue-black hair became thin and white.

Mr. Poppleton, noticing her unrest, put it all down to Hugh, and cursed his brother to Miss Dorcas in forcible language. He had told her the story.

"He wants kicking," he said.

"Lots of men do," agreed Miss Dorcas, placidly.

Victoria was married in the summer. William Spong had been presented with a living by a bishop who liked orthodox, unenterprising churchmen scattered about his diocese. The ritualistic firebrands disturbed his serenity of mind. They were always doing something they shouldn't, necessitating letters of caution and warning. The bishop was not partial to letter writing. William was mild, orderly, reliable, and a gentleman. Hence the presentation.

Victoria looked placidly beautiful on her wed-

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ding day, and as expressionless as so many of the Madonnas scattered about Italian churches, pictures of which Tommie had sent to Diana to show her how ~~un~~interesting they could be. Her head was carried at exactly the right angle as she walked up the church on her father's arm, her eyes modestly cast down. Drusilla and Diana were the bridesmaids, in gowns of creamy silk muslin and large hats garlanded with green leaves. Somebody said afterward that Diana looked about the church far too much for a nicely behaved bridesmaid — possibly it was Aunt Ponsonby — she seemed to be searching for somebody.

Tommie was not present. Again he was abroad, this time in Norway. He sent Victoria a beautiful little turquoise necklace, and said he wasn't sure whether he would be back for the ceremony or not. He might possibly turn up at the last minute. Anyway he sent her his blessings, and wished her and William Spong all good things.

He didn't turn up, and Diana's irritability that day was remarked upon by more than one old friend of the family. She knew now that Tommie was deliberately avoiding her. And he had often told her that he would rather have her as a friend than not at all.

It looked like it.

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There was no good pretending she didn't miss him, for she did — horribly. There never had been such a friend, never any one who had talked so well and interestingly on such a variety of subjects. Never any one who knew so well when to keep silent. She did not love him, she did not want to marry him, but she fretted for him. She could scarcely bear to pass the Sutherlands' house, scarcely bear to see the trim little lawns and gravel paths and no Tommie in a deck chair reading and smoking. The faun by the front door seemed to grin at her in mocking fashion.

He still wrote to her — long, delightful letters, full of descriptions of the places he was seeing, full of humour, and always kind and sympathetic. Tommie could never be anything but kind. But they contained no words of love. Once he referred to Captain Poppleton, and asked if she ever saw or heard from him. And her reply was: "I thought I had mentioned that he had passed out of my life forever."

And so the year passed, and Diana and Tommie never once met.

The Christmas holidays came round and again Tommie was away. He went to Switzerland, to one of the winter sports places. Old Mr.

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Sutherland had become wonderfully mild and docile at being left so much alone. But Tommie had come to him early in the year just after his return from Italy, and with Diana's letter — telling him that her love affair with Captain Poppleton had ended — hugged close to his heart, and had said that he wanted a year's liberty, a year to himself, to do as he liked, and without any opposition from his grandfather as to his goings and comings.

The old man had looked at him in surprise. He saw that his grandson was deeply moved.

"I have a reason, a strong reason, for wishing to be away when the impulse seizes me. It is a matter of great importance to me. I am fighting for my happiness. I have tried everything else — this seems the only way left to me. Do not ask me to explain — it would be difficult. Perhaps you already understand. . . . I have never hidden anything from you, and I have always tried to do as you wish — but this time—give me a free hand, will you?"

And the old man had agreed, and had kept to his word. He began, too, to connect Tommie's goings with Diana's comings, and was a little mystified. He had believed for years that Tommie was in love with Diana. Why then run

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away from her? It was a queer way of courting a girl. "Keep on asking a woman and she'll give in, in the end," was his maxim, forgetting there were women and women.

Tommie was wiser than his grandfather. He was teaching Diana to miss him, to want him — at least that was his hope, he was always humble. In the spring, perhaps during the next Easter holidays, he would once again ask her to be his wife. A year would then have elapsed since she had sent Captain Poppleton away. In that year her love for him might have died, and a new affection be ready to spring into life. He would be content with very little at first. He was still patient, still ready, as he had always affirmed, just to serve her, take care of her, worship her, asking for little in return, but always filled with the hope that as he loved her so she might learn to love him.



## CHAPTER V

And long ago the reader and critic, without needing to be especially astute, will have formed the opinion that Diana eventually married Tommie.

Of course she did. This story will have been in vain and ill told if it has not made it clear from the very beginning that these two were specially made for one another.

"We are both moved to laughter by the same things, we both want to go and hide in a hole when our feelings are touched," Diana had once said. And Tommie had replied "Of course," surprised that she had felt the necessity for even mentioning such a fact, its obviousness being so great. And this meant a true sympathy of tastes, a real comradeship. There never was a greater fallacy (to my thinking) handed down through the ages — and possibly perpetrated by a man, for a woman would have known better — than that extremes meet. They don't. They quarrel and drift apart, each extreme going his and her own way, and often drifting so far that they become

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permanently sundered unless there be some connecting bridge — a little child, perhaps — to bring them together again.

Yes, Diana and Tommie were created for one another, but she might never have made this great discovery, never learned that she loved him, had she not been very near to losing him. And the way of it happened thus:

Spring had come round again, a spring cold, and with it the bitter east wind that an English climate is so prone to fling in our teeth.

Mr. Poppleton had influenza, a bad attack that left him low and weak. Then Susie caught it, then Diana. Miss Dorcas escaped because she said she was too busy to catch it.

When they were up and about again, white and wan, shivering in front of the fire and trying not to cry on the slightest provocation, Miss Dorcas spoke, and her words were those of wisdom: "You must all go away where there is some sun and warmth and brightness, and where there are no east winds and no draughts under doors and — I will take you. I have one hundred and fifty pounds lying idle in the bank, and I don't know what to do with it. I have lost faith in all stocks and shares so long as a Liberal Government is in power, and if I leave it lying there

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much longer I am convinced the Chancellor of the Exchequer will grab it — there is no telling to what lengths that man will go. So I'd rather spend it myself than give it to some workingman to buy a piano or a picture to improve his mind and cultivate his artistic tastes; so — where shall we go — Italy or the south of France? The south of France for choice, for I know by experience, that Italy can be very cold in March."

All that Mr. Poppleton felt able to say was, "Oh Dorcas!" but he said it with great expression. Diana could find no words at all — warmth, brightness, sunshine, mountains, sea, change! Change of air, change of people, change of scene! Her cheeks glowed, her eyes were brighter than they had been for many months.

"I shall pay half," said Mr. Poppleton.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," snapped Miss Dorcas producing three Baedekers, with worn red covers, one of each she placed before Mr. Poppleton and Diana, and one before herself.

Then followed a delightful, though exhausting, week with guides, Bradshaws, Cook's books of tours, followed by a packing of compressed cane trunks and enormous hold-alls. Ten days later saw them in a hotel among the mountains above Mentone and the sea.

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There were mountains on every side but that leading to the south and the sea; there were pines on the ridge above them, there was sweet smelling rosemary and wild mint. There was peach blossom standing out against the blue of the sky, and violets and scarlet anemones in the grass, there were delicious patches of bean all a-flowering, and tender little vine leaves clinging with delicate green fingers to the pergolas up the hillsides, and over all was the beautiful hot sun.

Mr. Poppleton was in ecstasies, his artist's soul waxed hot within him. With his sketching materials he was out the livelong day, eager to transfer to canvas the beauty set out before him like a feast. Susie, mounted on a donkey, and bearing their luncheon was often with him, and as their gay laughter sounded along the mule paths, Miss Dorcas, too, would smile in sympathy.

Miss Dorcas, whisper it gently, was more often to be found at the Casino than one would have expected of a serene-faced, beautiful, white-haired elderly lady. But then she played such modest stakes, and she played so calmly, and with such well-bred gentle dignity, and without feverish haste and snatching and grabbing at her winnings, that the whole proceeding, Diana said, was more like a poem or benediction than vulgar gambling.

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And Diana herself lay in the sun amongst the rosemary and white heather, and sometimes read, but more often watched the little darting lizards and the ants crawling in single file across the mule path she had just ascended, in search, no doubt, of new worlds to conquer.

And a day came when Mr. Poppleton ascended the mule path bearing a letter in his hand. He was off for a day's sketching, and, as the post was just in as he left the hotel, he thought he would leave this letter, which was for Diana, in passing.

It was from home. She had hoped it might have been from Tommie. He had not written for some time — slowly she turned it over in her hand — she longed suddenly for a sight of him; eighteen whole months had elapsed since they had met. She longed to hear his voice, his pleasant well-bred voice, with its halting speech when he was much in earnest about a subject, the scorn in it when he was indignant, the sudden dry little laugh when he was amused. She wanted, too, to see his face and the tender look in his grave kind eyes, the look that he had always reserved for her. She felt lonely, starved, out in the cold with Tommie always now treating her with such marked indifference and neglect.

Slowly she broke open the envelope and began

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absent-mindedly to read her letter, but at the first words a little sharp cry broke from her: "You will be grieved and shocked to hear that Tommie has had a terrible accident, and hardly expected to live. He was thrown from his horse and dragged ——" She waited to read no more. With the letter crushed in her pocket, her lips white, her eyes wild and distraught with fear, she flew down the path and into the hotel.

"Have I time to catch the express to Paris and London?"

The concierge, who was Swiss, was bewildered and scratched his head.

"Have I, or have I not?" she almost screamed.

"You just might ——"

"Order the bus *at once*." She ran up the stairs to Miss Dorcas's room. "Will you lend me some money and send my clothes after me? I'm going to London and Heatherland now, this minute. Tommie, my friend, is ill, dying perhaps. Don't question me, there's no time. Good-bye."

"You can't travel in that white dress. Here's a cloak." Wrapping a grey pelisse around the girl and putting some money into her hand, Miss Dorcas followed her down the stairs and saw her into the funicular.

"You love this man?" she ventured to ask.

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"Yes," said Diana, and a wave of colour flooded her face and neck whilst she trembled from head to foot. "I love him — I've only just discovered it, and — he may be dead." Her lips quivered piteously.

"I do not believe it," said Miss Dorcas as she kissed her. "Good-bye, and God be with you both."

Diana never afterwards could speak or think of that journey without breaking down. By the time she reached Heatherland she had passed through every stage of anxiety and emotion. "Tommie dead," she kept repeating to herself mechanically. "What would the world be to me if Tommie were dead? Kind, dear Tommie. And I took all his goodness to me, all his unselfishness, all his love for me, as a matter of course. Never once thanked him, never showed him my gratitude, and now — it may be too late." All through the long hours of the night as the train rushed from Marseilles to Paris and Paris to Calais, with wide-opened eyes staring into the darkness, she repeated, "And it may be too late, it may be too late." She never slept, food never passed her lips, yet she felt no sense of fatigue or hunger. She moved from train to boat and boat to train like a person

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in a dream. One desire dominated every other sensation — that if Tommie were to die, she should be in time to tell him first that she loved him. This desire was so great, so enormous, so almost superhuman, that it seemed to her she was holding Tommie's spirit back, compelling it to stay till she had lain her own soul bare to him and whispered her words of love.

On arriving at Birkenhead she paused for five minutes whilst she washed her hands and arranged her hair. She must not go to Tommie travel stained. The pelisse had kept her gown clean. She felt glad she was in white. A bright spot burnt on either white cheek from excitement; there was no trace of fatigue on her face.

She took an open fly and drove through the budding lanes to Heatherland, past Moss Deeping and straight to the Sutherlands' house.

It was with an effort she raised her eyes to the windows. The blinds were up, but — it was over four days since her mother's letter had been posted to her. There would have been time . . . so much can happen in four days . . . She held her hands to her beating heart and sped up the garden path; the faun leered and mocked as she passed. The front door was open, nobody was about, all was very quiet and still. She ran



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across the hall and up the stairs and along the landing to Tommie's door . . . A nurse came out as she stood striving to steady her wildly beating pulses, and looked at her in surprise.

"How is he? Will . . . he live?" Her lips formed the words, but they were spoken so low the nurse could scarcely hear them.

"He is better, and the doctor gives us hope to-day. Excuse me, but may I ask if your name is Diana — Miss Diana Wenderby?"

"Yes."

"Then he *will* live and — you may go to him." She opened the door, allowed Diana to pass in, and gently closed it.

At the first, in the shaded room, Diana could hardly discern the figure lying there so helpless on the bed, and she stood trembling by the doorway, her hands outstretched to him. And when she found her voice it was very gently, very tenderly she spoke to him, as to a little child: "Tommie, I have come to you, I have come to tell you that I love you. Not because you are hurt and injured, but because I love you and cannot live without you. Am I too late? Say that it is not so! Say that you still care for me!"

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For a moment he lay still, wondering, almost fearful. Was he dreaming? Always had he dreamed thus of Diana — asleep and awake — dreamed that she would come to him and say, "Tommie, I love you." And she was here, here in a white gown with something grey and shadowy slipping from her shoulders, and a smile like an angel's on her lips, and her hands outstretched to him. Could it be only a dream?

"Is it true?" he breathed, trying to raise himself in bed. "Can it be true?" His eyes absorbed her.

Swiftly she crossed the room and knelt at his side, clasping his thin white hands in hers. "It is true," she whispered, "but you must lie still, you must be good for both our sakes." She fought hard to keep back her tears at the havoc suffering had wrought in his face, but even as she looked at him, the pain seemed to die away, and in its place a light and a great gladness irradiated his every feature and shone in his eyes.

"Beloved one," and in his voice was the old whimsical note, "I am in a sorry plight, broken to bits and bandaged up like a trussed fowl, but will you be kind to me and help me? Will you creep under this right arm — he's the soundest

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one — and lay your head on my breast — just there. Thank you.”

In silence he lay for some time, and she could feel the hot tears fall on her head and cheek, his tears of joy and thankfulness, but presently he spoke again: “Raise your head a little, beloved sweetheart, I want to feel your lips against mine.”

And again she did his bidding.

THE END





This Book is Due

ANNEX

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